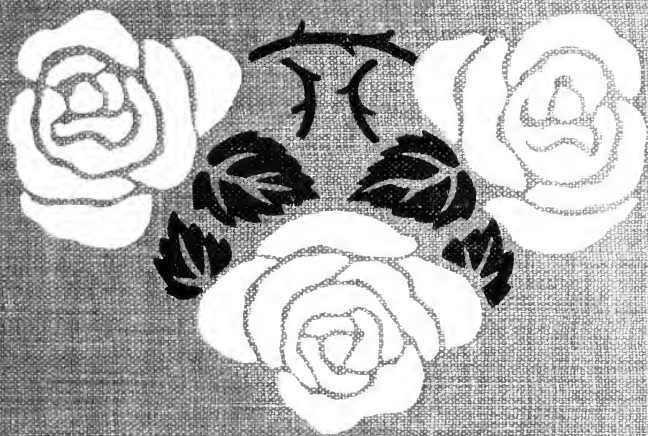
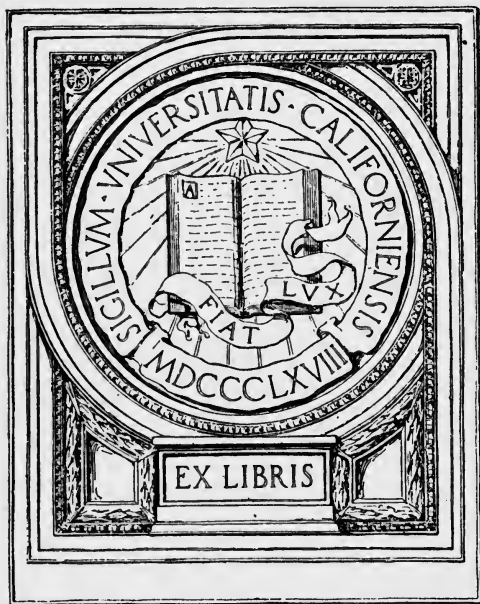


*The
Haunted
Photograph*



Ruth Mc Enery Stuart

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THE HAUNTED PHOTOGRAPH



Do I look strange, I wonder ?

The Haunted Photograph Whence and Whither A Case in Diplomacy The Afterglow

BY
RUTH McENERY STUART

ILLUSTRATED BY WM. L. JACOBS, PETER NEWELL,
ETHEL PENNEWILL BROWN AND WILSON C. DEXTER



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THE HAUNTED PHOTOGRAPH

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TO the ordinary observer it was just a common photograph of a cheap summer hotel. It hung, sumptuously framed in plush, over the widow Morris's mantel, the one resplendent note in an otherwise modest home, in a characteristic Queen Anne village.

One had only to see the rapt face of its owner as she sat in her weeds before the picture which she tearfully pronounced "a strikin' likeness," to sympathize with the townsfolk who looked askance at the bereaved woman, even while they bore with her delusion, feeling sure that her sudden sorrow had set her mind agog.

When she had received the picture through the mail, some months before the fire which consumed the hotel—a fire

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through which she had not passed but out of which she had come a widow—she proudly handed it around among the friends waiting with her at the post office, replying to their questions as they admired it:

“Oh, yes! that ’s where he works—if you can call it work. He ’s the head steward in it. All that row o’ winders where you see the awnin’s down, they ’re his—an’ them that ain’t down, they ’re his, too—that is to say it ’s his jurusdiction.

“You see, he ’s got the whiphand over the cook *an’* the sto’e-room, an’ that key don’t go out o’ his belt unless he knows who ’s gettin’ what—an’ he ’s firm. Morris always was. He ’s like the iron law of the Ephesians.”

“*What key?*”

It was an old lady who held the picture at arm’s length the more closely to scan it, who asked the question. She asked it, partly to know, as neither man nor key ap-

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peared in the photograph, and partly to parry the "historic allusion"—a disturbing sort of fire for which Mrs. Morris was rather noted and which made some of her most loyal townsfolk a bit shy of her.

"Oh, I ain't referrin' to the picture," she hastened to explain; "I mean the keys thet he always carries in his belt. The reg'lar joke there is to call him 'St. Peter,' an' he takes it in good part, for, he declares, if there *is* such a thing *as* a similitude to the kingdom o' Heaven *in* a hotel, why it 's in the providential supply department which in a manner hangs to his belt. He always humors a joke—'specially on himself."

No one will ever know through what painful periods of unrequited longing the widow Morris had sought solace in this, her only cherished "relic," after the "half hour of sky-works" which had made her, in her own vernacular, "a lonely, conflagrated widow with a heart full of ashes,"

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before the glad moment when it was given her to discern in it an unsuspected and novel value. First had come as a faint gleam of comfort, the reflection that although her dear lost one was not in evidence in the picture, he had really been inside the building when the photograph was taken, and so, of course, *he must be in there yet!*

At first she experienced a slight disappointment that her man was not visible, at door or window. But it was only a passing regret. It was really better to feel him surely and broadly within—at large in the great house, free to pass at will from one room to another. To have had him fixed no matter how effectively would have been a limitation. As it was, she pressed the picture to her bosom as she wondered if perchance, he would not some day come out of his hiding to meet her.

It was a muffled pleasure and tremulously entertained, at first, but the very

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whimsicality of it was an appeal to her sensitized imagination and so, when, finally, the thing did really happen, it is small wonder that it came somewhat as a shock.

It appears that, one day, feeling particularly lonely and forlorn, and having no other comfort, she was pressing her tear-stained face against the row of window-shutters in the room without awnings, this being her nearest approach to the alleged occupant's bosom, when she was suddenly startled by a peculiar swishing sound, as of wind-blown rain, whereupon she lifted her face to perceive that it was indeed raining and then, glancing back at the photograph, she distinctly saw her husband rushing from one window to another, drawing down the sashes on the side of the house that would have been exposed to the real shower whose music was in her ears.

This was a great discovery, and, naturally enough, it set her weeping for, she sobbed, "it made her feel, for a minute,

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that she had lost her widowhood and that, after the shower, he 'd be coming home."

It might well make any one cry to suddenly lose the pivot upon which his emotions are swung. At any rate, Mrs. Morris cried. She *said* that she cried all night, first because it seemed so spooky to see him whose remains she had so recently buried on faith, waiving recognition in the débris, dashing about now in so matter of fact a way.

And then, she wept because, after all, he did not come.

This was the formal beginning of her sense of personal companionship in the picture. Companionship? Yes, of delight in it, and I use the word with malice prepense, for there is even delight in tears—in some situations in life. Especially is this true of one whose emotions are her only guides, as seems to have been the case with the widow Morris.

After seeing him draw the window sashes

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—and he had drawn them *down*, ignoring her presence—she sat for hours, waiting for the rain to stop, but it seemed to have set in for a long spell, for when she finally fell asleep, “from sheer disappointment, ’long towards morning,” it was still raining, and when she awoke, the sun shone and all the windows in the picture were up again.

This was a misleading experience, however, for she soon discovered that she could not count upon any line of conduct by the man in the hotel as the fact that it had one time rained in the photograph at the same time that it rained outside was but a coincidence and she was soon surprised to perceive all quiet along the hotel piazza, not even an awning flapping, while the earth, on her plane, was torn by storms.

On one memorable occasion when her husband had appeared, flapping the window-panes from within with a towel, she had thought for one brief moment that he

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was beckoning to her—and that she might have to go to him, and she was beginning to experience terror with shortness of breath and other premonitions of sudden passing when she discovered that he was merely killing flies and she flurriedly fanned herself with the asbestos mat which she had seized from the stove beside her and staggered out to a seat under the mulberries, as she stammered in broken accents:

“I *do* *de*-clare, Morris ’ll be the death of me, yet. He ’s most as much care to me dead as he was alive. . . . I made sure—made sure he ’d come after me!”

And then, challenging her own fidelity, she hastened to add, “Not that I had n’t rather go to him than to take any trip in the world, but—but I never did fancy that hotel, and since I ’ve got used to seein’ him there so constant, I feel sure that ’s where we ’d put up. My belief is, anyway, that if there ’s hereafters for some things,



She fanned herself with the asbestos mat

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there 's hereafters for all. From what I can gather, I reckon I 'm a kind of a cross between a Sweden-borgeian and a Gates-ajar—that, of course, engrafted on to a Methodist. Now, that hotel, when it was consumed by fire, which to it was the same as mortal death, why, it either ascended into Heaven, in smoke, or it fell, in ashes—to the other place. If it died worthy, like as not it 's undergoin' repairs now for a 'mansion,' jasper cupolas, an'—but, of course, such as that could be run up in a twinklin'.

“Still, from what I 've heard, it 's more likely gone down to its deserts. It would seem hard for a hotel with so many awned-off corridors an' palmed embrasures with teet-a-teet sofas to live along without sin.”

She stood on her step-ladder, wiping the face of the picture as she spoke, and as she began to back down, she discovered the cat under her elbow, glaring at the picture.

“Yes, Kitty! Spit away!” she ex-

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claimed. "Like as not you see even more than I do!"

And, as she slipped the ladder back into the closet, she remarked—this to herself, strictly:

"If it had n't 'a' been for poor Puss, I 'd 'a' had a heap more pleasure out o' this picture than what I have had—or will be likely to have again. The way she's taken on, I 've almost come to hate it!"

A serpent had entered her poor little Eden—even the green-eyed monster constrictor who, if given full swing, would not spare a bone of her meager comfort.

A neighbor who chanced to come in at the time, unobserved, overheard the last remark and Mrs. Morris, seeing that she was there, continued in an unchanged tone, while she gave her a chair,

"Of course, Mis' Withers, you know or can easy guess who I refer to. I mean that combly-featured wench thet kep' the books an' answered the telephone at the hotel—



The cat glaring at the picture



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when she found the time from her med-dlin'. Somehow, I never thought about her bein' burned in with Morris till Puss give her away. Puss never did like the girl when she was alive an' the first time I see her scratch an' spit at the picture, just the way she used to do whenever *she* come in sight, why it just struck me like a clap o' thunder out of a clear sky that Puss knew who she was a-spittin' at—an' I switched around sudden—an' glanced up sudden—an',—

“Well, what I seen, I seen! There was that beautied-up type-writer settin' in the window-sill o' Morris's butler's pantry—an' if she didn't wink at me malicious, then I don't know malice when I see it. An' she used her fingers against her nose, too, most defiant an' impolite. So I says to Puss, I says, ‘Puss,’ I says, ‘there's *goin's on* in that hotel, sure as fate. An-nabel Bender has got the better o' me, for once!’ An' tell the truth, it did spoil the

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photograph for me, for a while, for, of course, after that, if I did n't see him somewheres on the watch for his faithful spouse, I 'd say to myself, 'He 's inside there with that pink-featured hussy!'

“You know a man 's a man, Mis' Withers—'specially Morris—an' with his lawful wife cut off an' indefinitely divorced by a longevitied family—an' another burned in with him—well, his faithfulness is put to a trial by fire, as you might say. So, as I say, it spoiled the picture for me, for a while.

“An', to make matters worse, it was n't any time before I recollected that Campbellite preacher that was burned in with 'em, an' with that, my imagination run riot, an' I 'd think to myself, '*If they 're inclined, they cert'n'y have things handy!*' Then I 'd ketch myself an' say, 'Where 's your faith in Scripture, Mary Marthy Matthews, named after two Bible women an' born daughter to an apostle? What 's the

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use?' I 'd say, an' so, first an' last, I 'd get a sort o' alpha an' omega comfort out o' the passage about no givin' in marriage. Still, there 'd be times, pray as I would, when them three would loom up, him an' her—*an'* the Campbellite preacher. I know his license to marry would run out *in time*, but for eternity, of course we don't know. Seem like everything would last forever—an' then again, if I 've got a widow's freedom, Morris must be classed as a widower, if he 's anything.

“Then I 'd get some relief in thinkin' about his disposition. Good as he was, Morris was fickle-tasted, not in the long run but day in an' day out, an' even if he 'd be taken up with her, he 'd get a distaste the minute he reelized she 'd be there interminable. That 's Morris. Why, did n't he used to get nervous just seein' *me* around, an' me his own selected—? An' did n't I use to make some excuse to send him over to Mame Maddern's ma's

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ma's—so 's he 'd be harmlessly diverted—? She was full o' talk, but she was ninety-odd an' asthmatic, an' the jokes she 'd crack would all have to come through that false set. I recollect he used to joke about her falsetto laugh—but he 'd come home from them visits an' call me his child wife. I 've had my happy moments!

“You know a man 'll get tired of himself, even, if he 's condemned to it too continual, and think of that blondinetted type-writer for a steady diet—to a man like Morris! Imagine her when her hair-dye started to give out—green streaks in that pompadour! So, knowin' my man, I 'd take courage an' I 'd think, ‘Seein’ me cut off, he 'll soon be wantin’ me more than ever’—an’ so he does. It 's got so now that glance up at that hotel any time I will, I can generally find him on the lookout, an’ many 's the time I 've stole in an’ put on his favoryte apron o’ mine with blue bows on it, when we 'd be alone an’ nobody to re-

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mark about me breakin' my mournin'. Dear me, how full o' buoyancy he was—a regular boy at thirty-five, when he passed away!"

Was it any wonder that her friends exchanged glances while Mrs. Morris entertained them in this way? Still, as time passed and she not only brightened in the light of her delusion but proceeded to meet the changed conditions of her life by opening a small shop in her home, and when she exhibited a wholesome sense of profit and loss, her neighbors were quite ready to accept her on terms of mental responsibility.

With occupation and a modest success, emotional disturbance was surely giving place to an even calm when, one day, something happened.

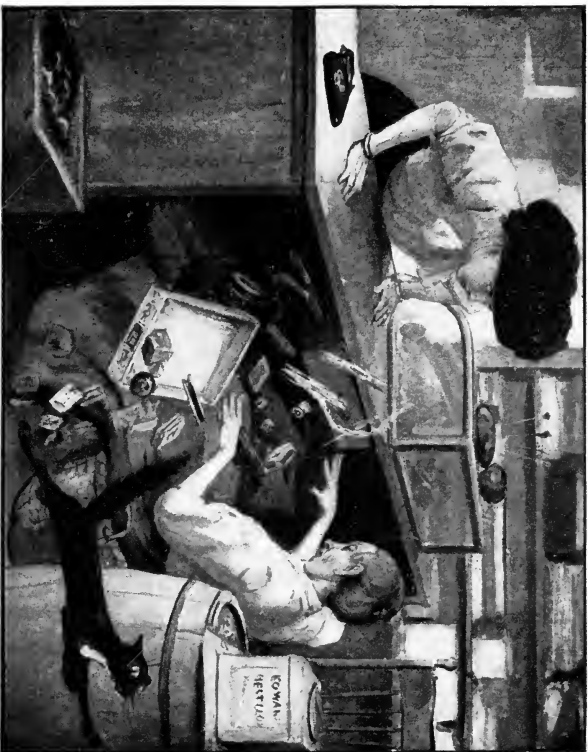
Mrs. Morris sat behind her counter, sorting notions, puss asleep beside her, when she heard the swish of thin silk, with a breath of familiar perfume and, looking up, whom did she see but the blonde lady

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of her troubled dreams, striding bodily up to the counter, smiling as she swished.

At the sight, the good woman first rose to her feet and then as suddenly dropped—flopped—breathless and white—backward—and had to be revived, so that for the space of some minutes, things happened very fast—that is, if we may believe the flurried testimony of the blonde who, in going over it, two hours later, had more than once to stop for breath.

“Well, say!” she panted, “Did you ever! *Such* a turn as took her! I hadn’t no more ’n stepped in the door when she succumbed, green as the Ganges, into her own egg-basket—an’ it full! An’ she was on the eve o’ floppin’ back into the prunin’ scizzor, points up, when I scrambled over the counter, breakin’ my straight front in two, which she ’s welcome to, poor thing! Then I loaned her my smellin’ salts which she held her breath against until it got to be a case of smell or die, an’ she smelt!



She succumbed, green as the Ganges, into her own egg-basket



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Then it was a case of temporary spasms for a minute, the salts spillin' out over her face, but when the accident evaporated, an' she had partially come to, an' opened her eyes, rational, I thought to myself, 'Maybe she don't know she 's keeled an' would be humiliated if she did,' so I acted callous an' I says, off-hand, like, I says, pushin' her apron around behind her over its *vice versa*, so 's to cover up the eggs which I thought had better be broke to her gently, I says, 'I just called in, Mis' Morris, to borry your reci-pe for angel cake—or maybe get you to bake one for us' (I knew she baked on orders). An' with that, what does she do but go over again, limp as wet starch, down an' through every egg in that basket, solid *an'* fluid!

“Well, by this time, a man who had seen her at her first worst an' run for a doctor, he come in with three an' whilst they were bowin' to each other an' backin', I giv' 'er her stimulus an' d'rectly she turned upon

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me one rememberable gaze an' she says, 'Doctors,' says she, 'would you think they 'd have the gall to try to get me to cook for 'em? They 've ordered angel—" An' with that, over she toppled again, no pulse nor nothin' same as the dead!"

While the blonde talked, she busied herself with her loosely-falling locks which she tried vainly to entrap.

"An' yet, you say she ain't classed as crazy? I 'd say it of her, sure! An' so old Morris is dead—burned in that old hotel, well, well! Poor old fellow! Dear old place! What times I 've had!"

She spoke through a mouthful of gilt hairpins and her voice was as an eolian harp.

"An' he burned in it—an' she 's a widow, yet! Yes, I did hear there 'd been a fire, but you never can tell. I thought the chimney might 'a' burned out—an' at the time I was in the thick of bein' engaged to the night clerk at the Singin'-needles

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hotel at Pineville—an' there 's no regular mail there—I thought the story might be exaggerated. Oh, no, I didn't marry the night clerk. I 'm a bride now, married to the head steward, same rank as poor old Morris—an' we 're just *as* happy! I used to pleg Morris about *her* hair, but I 'd have to let up on that now. Mine 's as red again as hers. No, not my hair—*mine* 's hair. It 's as red as a flannen drawer, every bit an' grain!

“But, say—” she added presently, “when she gets better, just tell her nevermind about that reci-pe. I copied it out of her reci-pe book whilst she was under the weather, an' dropped a dime in her cash drawer. I recollect how old Morris used to look forward to her angel cakes week-ends he 'd be goin' home, an' you know there 's nothin' like havin' ammunition, in marriage, even if you never need it. Mine 's in that frame of mind now that transforms my ginger-bread into

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angel cake—but the time may come when I 'll have to beat my eggs to a fluff so 's not to have it taste like ginger-bread to him.

“Oh, no, he 's not with me, this trip. I just run down for a lark to show my folks my ring an' things an' let 'em see it 's really so. He give me considerable jewelry. His First's taste run that way, an' they ain't no children.

“Yes, this amethyst is the weddin'-ring. I selected that on account of him bein' a widower, an' the year not bein' up. That 's why he stayed home, this trip. He did n't like to be seen traversin' the same old haunts with Another till it *was* up. I would n't wait because, tell the truth, I was afraid.

“He ain't like a married man with me about money yet, an' it 's liable to seize him any day. He might say that he could n't afford the trip, or that we could n't, which would amount to the same

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thing. I rather liked him bein' a little ticklish about goin' around with me for a while. It's one thing to do a thing an' another to be brazen about it—

“But if she don't get better—” the reversion was to the widow Morris—“if she don't get her mind, poor thing, there's a fine insane asylum just out of Pineville, an' I'd like the best in the world to look out for her, if they was to send her there. It would make an excuse for me to go in. They say they have great old times there. Some days they let the inmates do most any old thing that's harmless. They even give 'em unpoisonous paints an' let 'em paint each other up. One man, they say, insisted he was a barber-pole an' ringed himself around according', an' then another chased him around for a stick of peppermint-candy. Think of all that inside a close fence, an' a town so dull an' news-hungry—

“Yes, they say Thursdays is paint days,

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an', of course, Fridays, they are scrub days. They pass around turpentine an' hide the matches.

“But, of course, Mis' Morris may get the better of it. 'T ain' every woman that can stand widowin', an' sometimes them that has got the least out of marriage will seem the most deprived to lose it—so they say.”

The blonde was a person of words.

When Mrs. Morris had fully revived and after a restoring “night's sleep” had got her bearings, and when she realized that her supposed rival had actually shown up in the flesh, she visibly braced up. Her neighbors understood that it must have been a shock “to be suddenly confronted with any souvenir of the hotel fire”—so one had expressed it—and the incident soon passed out of the village mind.

It was not long after this incident that the widow confided to a friend that she

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was coming to depend upon Morris for advice in her business.

“Standing as he does, in that hotel door—between two worlds, as you might say—why he sees both ways, and oftentimes he ’ll detect an event *on the way to happening*, an’ if it don’t move too fast, why I can hustle an’ get the better of things.” It was as if she had a private wire for advance information—and she declared herself comforted if not entirely happy.

Indeed, a certain ineffable light, such as we sometimes see in the eyes of those newly in love, came to shine from the face of the widow who did not hesitate to affirm, looking into space as she said it,

“Takin’ all things into consideration, I can truly say that I have never been so truly and ideely married as since my widowhood.” And she smiled as she added,

“Marriage, the earthly way, is vicissitudinous, for everybody knows that anything is liable to happen to a man at large.”

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There had been a time when she lamented that her picture was not "life sized" as it would have seemed so much more natural, but she immediately reflected that that hotel would never have gotten into her little house, and that, after all, the main thing was having her man under her own roof.

.
As the months passed, Mrs. Morris, albeit she seemed serene and of peaceful mind, grew very white and still. Fire is white in its ultimate intensity. The top, spinning its fastest, is said to "sleep"—and the dancing dervish is "still." So, misleading signs sometimes mark the danger-line.

"Under-eating and over-thinking" was what the doctor said while he felt her translucent wrist and prescribed nails in her drinking-water. If he secretly knew that kind nature was gently letting down the bars so that a waiting spirit might easily pass—well, he was a doctor, not a

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minister. His business was with the body, and he ordered repairs.

She was only thirty-seven and “well” when she passed painlessly out of life. It seemed to be simply a case of going.

There were several friends at her bedside the night she went and to them she turned, feeling the time come:

“I just want to give out that the first thing I intend to do when I ’m relieved is to call by there for Morris—” She lifted her weary eyes to the picture as she spoke. “—for Morris—and I want it understood that it ’ll be a vacant house from the minute I depart. So, if there ’s any other woman that ’s calculatin’ to have any carryin’s-on from them windows—why, she ’ll be disappointed—she or they. The one obnoxious person I thought was in it *was n’t*. My imagination was tempted of Satan an’ I was mislead. So it must be sold for just what it is—just a photographer’s photograph. If it ’s a picture with

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a past, why everybody knows what that past is and will respect it. I have tried to conquer myself enough to bequeath it to the young lady I suspicioned, but human nature is frail an' I can't quite do it, although, doubtless, she would like it as a souvenir. Maybe she 'd find it a little too souvenirish to suit my wifely taste, and yet—if a person is going to die—

“I suppose I might legate it to her—partly to recompense her for her discretion in leaving that hotel when she did—an' partly for undue suspicion—

“There 's a few debts to be paid, but there 's eggs an' things that 'll pay them, an' there 's no need to have the hen settin' in the window showcase any longer. It was a good advertisement, but I 've often thought it might be embarrassin' to her.” She was growing weaker, but she roused herself to amend,

“Better raffle that picture for a dollar a chance an' let the proceeds go to my

THE HAUNTED PHOTOGRAPH

funeral—an' I want to be buried in the hotel-fire general grave, commingled with him—an' what 's left over after the debts are paid, I bequeath to her—to make amends—an' if she don't care to come for it, let every widow in town draw for it. But she 'll come. Most any woman 'll take any trip, if it 's paid for. But look!" She raised her eyes excitedly toward the mantel, "Look! What 's that he 's wavin'?" It looks—Oh, yes, it is—it 's our wings—two pairs—mine a little smaller. I s'pose it 'll be the same old story—I 'll never be able to keep up—to keep up with him—an' I 've been so hap—

"Yes, Morris—I 'm comin'—"

And she was gone—into a peaceful sleep from which she easily passed just before dawn.

.
When all was well over, those who had sat with her to the end rose with one accord and went to the mantel where one even

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lighted an extra candle that they might more clearly scan the mysterious picture.

Finally, one said:

“You may think I ’m queer, but it does look different to me, already.”

“So it does,” said another, taking the candle. “Like a house for rent. I declare, it gives me the cold shivers.”

“I ’ll pay my dollar gladly, and take a chance for it,” whispered a third, “but I would n’t let such a thing as that enter my happy home—”

“Neither would I!”

“Nor me, neither. I ’ve had trouble enough. My first husband’s oil-painted portrait has brought me discord enough—an’ it was a straight likeness. I don’t want any more pictures to put in the hen-house.”

So the feeling ran among the mothers and wives.

“Well,” said she who was blowing out the candle, “I ’ll draw for it—an’ take it,

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if I win it, an' consider it a sort of inheritance which it is, in a way, to whoever gets it. I never inherited anything but indigestion—"

The last speaker was a maiden lady and so was she who answered her chuckling:

"That 's what I say! Anything for a change. There 'd be some excitement in a picture where a man was liable to show up. It 's more than I 've got now. I 'll risk my happiness with a chance. I 'm that reckless.

"I do declare, it 's just scandalous the way we 're laughin', an' the poor soul hardly out o' hearin'. She was a kind soul, Mis' Morris was, an' she made herself happy with a mighty slim chance—"

"Yes, she did," said another, forcibly pulling down the corners of her mouth, "*—on a mighty slim chance—and I only wish there 'd been a better man waitin' for her in that hotel.*"

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SALLY ANN SALISBURY was a long name for a servant in slave days—a long name for familiar use—but it was one frequently called across the back yard over the wood piles at Belle Haven plantation. It generally took about three calls to elicit response when there would slowly emerge from the wash-shed a slim yellow woman who, languidly shading her eyes with one hand, the other far back upon her hip, would answer:

“Who dat?”

She would answer thus even when, as was rarely the case, the voice was that of her young mistress, and then she would condescendingly take an order or even agree to hurry a piece of work, although in this case she would generally append a

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drawling, "Yas 'm," and even a reluctant "d'rec'ly," as she turned away.

This last, by a strange inversion of meaning evolved from the dilatory habits of the time and place, was understood to mean "after a while," anything but the "directly" of the dictionaries.

Still, it held a tacit promise to hurry things a little and in a few moments, when she had made several deliberate turns about the shed or perhaps stopped to gather and eat a handful of figs from the tree at her doorstep or to conclude a conversation with an idler over the back fence, she would saunter up to the House, head in air, and generally with arms and shoulders fairly bewinged with fluted finery done to the queen's taste.

It was hard to find fault with one thus labeled with delightful evidences of her skill and, after all, the main use of a washwoman is that she shall wash well.

Sally Ann, more familiarly known as

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Sassie Salisbury—the “Sas” having been playfully evolved from her initials by one of the young masters on the place—was conceded to be the “sassiest gal along the river,” long before she married Salisbury and became unbearable, in consequence. She was sassiest, as well as the cleverest—the most unreliable. Mercurial to her finger-tips and gifted at whatever she put them to perform, she was at once an asset of utility and of trial. As Sally Ann Smith, she had been an element of discord among the negroes for several years during which she had tentatively borne the names of one or two of her most ardent suitors for short periods when she surprised everybody by marrying Steven Salisbury, a “free man of color,” twice her age and well to do. It was said that she first hoodooed him and then married him with a broomstick, but the last part of this was untrue, as the writer has reason to know.

All the wives of the place hated her, not

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only as an abiding menace to their domestic happiness but because of her lawless tongue, which was as nimble as her morals or her dancing feet or weightless fingers. If she could “do up” a bit of French lingerie for her young mistress—do it so exquisitely that that fastidious young lady was pleased to declare it “better than new,” so could she do over a piece of plantation gossip into a confection of scandal better than true, better, that is, by way of much adorning, ruffled, fluted and garnished to a turn by her ever nimble tongue.

And, by the way, the laundering of the finery of her young mistress had always been Sassie’s favorite work and for two reasons. First—yes, it must come first—Miss Geraldine was just exactly Sassie’s size, her height, her heft and measurements, and—this is the second reason—and she gave it with a wink: The two had “percizely de same taste in dress!” It had been convenient to be custodian of so



Sally Ann Salisbury

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much available finery. And Sassie really took a sort of servile pride in the radiant beauty of the mistress, who led her set socially. To an appreciable extent she felt her to be the product of her own skill.

And then, she was her model, her fashion-plate. She had only to look at Miss Geraldine to know, not only what to wear but how to wear it—how to “carry it off!” Sassie would twirl through the figures of the plantation dances in her mistress’s empire gowns, holding her slim body just as the fairer belle had done, and she would lift her little head, tilted for coquetry, over the spring of a medici collar—“just for all the world like Miss Geraldine”—and gown or collar would go home fairly bristling with the counterfeit newness available only by adept fingers.

Being as she was more of siren than saint, is it any wonder that the good wives and sweethearts hated her—and for shameful reasons.

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Everybody felt sorry when Steve married her—sorry for him. He was an industrious and amiable fellow who for years had plied his trade as plantation barber with never an indication that the main implement of his trade was available for warfare—a fine local test of character. And he was a clever negro, too, as was evinced by the sign which swung to his barber-pole and which read:

HAIR STRATENED.

Indeed, this had come to indicate a most profitable branch of his business and, although the locks from which he more or less successfully removed the kinks had a stubborn, atavistic way of reverting to the old habit after a time, he certainly accomplished wonders in immediate results and there was but one way to disprove his claim that “continuous treatment would make any hair as straight as an Indian’s”;

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and this way cost money, money which is of all things most scarce in plantation communities.

And Steve was not a charlatan. He had really made a clever machine of his own device which he had snappily named "The Daisy Stretcher," a simple contrivance which could lay hold of sections of hair at a grasp and while its manipulator put his full force upon it, the trick was done without pain or further inconvenience than was unavoidable—with one's head in a vise.

Steve owned his own shack and a mule and wagon, and a runabout for Sunday service, and his note for as much as fifty dollars was known to be negotiable even with the white storekeepers along the river.

The very fact that he could himself write and sign a promissory note set him upon a pinnacle so that it is easily seen that as a matrimonial *parti*, he stood high, even with the slight prejudice which his familiar name implied—"Six Toe Steve." The

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fact of the trifling deformity therein indicated had as a youth set him somewhat apart and made him taciturn.

We all know how any departure from the normal is apt to discount the attraction of sex. So does nature preserve her integrity. And yet, when we reflect to how slight a degree human happiness is a matter of fingers and toes, it does seem strange that one extra member so trivial as a little toe should have prejudiced the young feminine mind against the whole man, Steve Salisbury, *in toto*—and yet, so it was, or had been in his callow, sensitive days when he had tried to “circulate in society.”

Even yet, although a successful business man and of middle age, he was regarded as a little queer and detached—almost abnormal in his imperviousness to the wiles of womankind, when he suddenly became entangled in the meshes of Sally Ann’s net; and this figure is selected with malice pre-

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pense for its literal as well as figurative significance.

We all know the type of mulatress with a brush of foxy hair, kinked to the limit and with each strand seemingly so repellent to its neighbor that the result is like an electrified mop—and not always by any means unhandsome.

Such was Sally Ann, the siren of Silver Springs Baptist community—she whose head of foxy fluff she confined in a crimson net, carrying it thus up the Mississippi levee to the “Studio Parlors” just off the barber-shop of Steven Salisbury.

Demurely taking her seat before the Daisy Stretcher, she deftly slipped off the net, gave her head a single quick shake such as a King Charles spaniel gives his locks on occasion—and there she was.

Steve was a stolid fellow, or had been hitherto, and he would not have known the meaning of so high-sounding a word as capillary attraction. Still, he is not the

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first man who has felt things which he could not name.

When he had looked at the unusual tangle of color before him, run his professional fingers through it and drawn it out to its full seven inches of length and let it snap back into bewildering confusion—he hesitated.

Then, he worked at the Daisy Stretcher . a while, independently, as a fiddler who “tunes up” before he begins to play. And then—presently—having killed as much time as he dared—he drawled, with some confusion:

“Seem like a pity—Miss Sal’ Ann—pity to disturb it—whilst de net—” he was holding the net in his fingers—“whilst de net becomes it so fine—an’ yo’ head ain’t like mos’ ladies’ heads. You mought subjue deze locks down, for a time, but—but—”

Oh, well! Why follow them further? He was caught, and that is all there is of it. Sally Ann had actually gone to him

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with five dollars—the price of an entire course of treatment—in cash in her handkerchief—and she had taken pains to let him see the V in its crinkled green corner—but she took it home, intact. And Steve had been considered mercenary, too, but perhaps he was first of all an artist, or, more likely, he was just a normal man—and had been biding his fate.

Of course, Sally Ann knew all about the little extra toes, but she was not one to bother herself about trifles. Steve owned the best negro cabin along the river now, and his free-born parents before him had been property-holders and respectable.

Somehow, no one had foreseen their marriage, even after they had been for some time “running together.” Even Steve himself, who had undoubtedly lost his bearings in the first whirlpool of the romance, had not thought of it, either. Whether the woman did or not, it would be hard to say. Precedent was against it and

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it would not have been easy for her to take any particular stand in the matter—things having been as they had been.

A year and more passed and still the two were constantly together—as constantly as they could well be, living thus apart and both having work to do.

Sassie was very capricious and of a precarious popularity, and, although Steve was all devotion, he could not fully know how things were, precisely, and it was only when old Granny Griggs took the trouble to carry her heart disease, panting all the way from Sassie's bedside, a distance of half a muddy mile, to Steve's Studio Parlors to announce the birth of "a bouncin' six-toe boy!" that he was suddenly suffused with paternal certitude and, dropping the Daisy Stretcher upon the floor in his tremulous joy, he hitched up his gig and drove three miles for the minister of Silver Springs chapel, carried him over to

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Sassie's cabin and "made things right for the boy—and his mammy."

Most of life's values are relative, after all. So trivial and inconsequent a bagatelle as a little toe relatively considered, may become a power compellant, irresistible, as in this case, changing the whole face of life for a number of people.

In due time, which is to say in several weeks, the bride-mother and child were proudly on parade at all church and social functions, and generally accompanied by the beaming *pater*. For once in her life, Sassie was sorry she was a Baptist, as it would have been so fitting to have the child christened at the wedding supper, when he was four weeks old, and at which she appeared in orange flowers and a veil. Why not, and she for the first time a bride?

Steve would have taken mother and babe home with him, of course, had they been free. As it was, he stayed with them as

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much as he could and spent freely of his hoard for their adornment, this being the direction of his wife's ambition—and all things were happy and prosperous.

When Sassie returned to her laundry duties, the Junior lay in affluent upholstery in a wicker perambulator within the honeysuckle shade and the song of the tubs which rose above the droning of the bees was good to hear, harmonizing as it did with all the small noises of contentment in the vines.

The washboard's rubbing marked the measure and when there was a lull, as when the washer changed tubs, an infantile cooing would come from the wheeled cradle—cooing which developed into strenuous crowing with the passage of time, when the mother would go over and put the crower's thumb in his mouth, or one of his toes, "to stop the racket," and he would try to swallow all six toes at once and spit them out with salivary bubbles of baby glee, to the infinite joy of his parents, more espe-

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cially of his father when he was there. He was especially weak about the little feet, so palpably his bequest. This is a case where circumstantial evidence, so often fallacious, would have held in almost any court. Still, who knows anything final about anything? Six toes upon each of the feet of the child of a friend likewise endowed might be a coincidence. In certain circumstances, the occurrence could not be otherwise. But we must believe in something—or else go where the unbelievers go.

There was considerable chaffing on the plantation on the subject of Six Toe Steve's six toe boy, some declaring that Sassie was always lucky!

If with all its primitive crudeness, Steve's was a case of true love—and it seems to have been—it proved no exception to the rule against smooth running in its course. With so much that was propitious, clouds soon began to gather in his

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matrimonial sky. For one thing, Sassie was jealous. The Daisy Stretcher naturally brought its manipulator a steady clientele of women—women of the beauty-seeking type, a dangerous variety. Very few of the men bothered about their heads. Some there were, of course, youths mostly, who denied themselves and their sweet-hearts ginger-pop and cove oysters to essay the Cherokee act, but realizing no especial access of popularity with the very girls for whom the stretcher was doing its best, they generally soon lapsed into their luxuries and their kinks.

But the women were “fairly going crazy” over it, even some of the coal-black damsels paying their last cents for the three-inch fringes which by dint of crucial effort were made to connect with the long braids of jute which disfigured their heads.

Sassie “did n’t mind Steve’s straightening their wool for ’em, ef they craved to have it straight,” she said, with a toss of

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her own mop, but she failed to see the “justice of Steve’s bein’ away all day, enjoyin’ hisself wid a lot o’ fool women whilst she wore her life away, nussin’ his great stroppin’ child!”

And then, she would conclude:

“I nuver was no hearth-cat, nohow!” a declaration which no one could dispute, although it did not seem to be a reason why she should jostle poor little Junior nearly out of his perambulator, until he desperately threw all his vocal powers into the family squall.

This was not so very serious in itself as it was ominous of breakers ahead in the matrimonial sea. And, of course, this was but one phase of her discontent, for if Sassie had a single invariable quality, it was variability—variability in all its various phases.

Steve liked to refer to his increased responsibilities of married life, appropriating the term for its pleasing sound, but

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as a fact, matrimony had added to his necessary expenses not at all, the support of his family being the business of their owners. Still, he assumed responsibilities and he had paternal plans for his boy so that it was well for him to make more money and thus, in the course of the year, he opened a "branch station" where he set up another barber-shop and stretcher, dividing his time equally between the two. As the branch was more than ten miles away and the roads were heavy in the winter season, Sassie was left alone a good deal, dangerously free with discontent already fermenting within her, and so it was not long before she lapsed into a peevish slattern and then, by natural rebound, she sought solace in such passing sympathy as her cabin at the turn of the road afforded.

As is often the case in similar circumstances in life, Steve had no inkling of the real situation. A single-minded fellow and very busy, it never occurred to him to

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suspect complications at home. The boy waxed in vigor and filial appeal as he developed the infantile accomplishments in natural sequence and if his mother was sometimes a bit difficult in temper, the father rather liked the zest of it. It brought a realization of the blissful fact that he was really a married man and having to put up with a woman's ways. What does any man care about atmospheric disturbances while he looks into the clear eyes of the miniature of himself who is climbing over his knees and calling him daddy! And then, Sassie was really too near his vision for him to get much perspective upon her conduct. He had taken her to himself, as she was, soul and body, poor trusting heart—and even if he had seen the trifling neighbor-husbands hanging around her door while he was away, he would have been slow to question their being there.

As was natural to one of her invertebrate morality, as she gained in power over

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her man, so did she lose in worthiness and, more particularly, as she grew more familiar with the uses of money—its uses and abuses—not only did she fall from grace of being, but her work suffered.

She no longer cared much whether Miss Geraldine's ruffles were daintily fluted or not or that they were returned to her "on time," as of yore. The baby and his demands made excuse sufficient for all shortcomings and more than once, when she pleaded that she had "walked de flo' all night wid Junior," she had in truth done precisely that same—*with someone else* and to the slow cake-walk music of the fiddle. Of course, there was an element of risk in this, but it was slight, and for the reason that redress was so easy, if there was any tattling. Few of the denizens of the quarters were sufficiently "without sin" themselves to cast stones, fearing no rebound. Once there had been a report at The House of some liberty Sas-

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sie had taken with the wash with a result so promiscuously disastrous that discretion became the better part of valor and now she might have dared almost anything, without dread of detection.

So things went from bad to worse and in the course of a winter there were several fights on the place—fights in the reports of which a free use of razors was hinted at in connection with Sassie's name and some of the renegade husbands.

And yet, bridging over all things, there was always Steve's devotion, which, indeed, seemed never to fail, and inversely as he gained in popular favor, the woman of his life lost in following until finally her owners were "put to it" to know what to do with her.

Her work was no longer a consideration and every otherwise she was a disturber and a menace. And out of this dilemma it was that a plan of relief was evolved. The thing was suggested by none other

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than the fair Geraldine, to whom her father, driven desperate by fresh complaints of the woman, one morning exclaimed:

“I ’ll be switched if I know what to do with her! I could n’t sell her—or give her away! Nobody ’d have her!”

To which Geraldine answered.

“What about Steve? Why not just turn her over to Steve? He ’d take her—and thank you!”

It was a new thought and it struck home. The very simplicity of it was bewildering. But for a second only. Walking up to his daughter, the old Judge held out his hand.

“Shake!” he exclaimed, and then moving off and regarding her, “Jerry, you ’ve got a head on you! You ought ’ve been a boy!”

“I don’t see why you keep saying that to me, father!” she laughed, “when there ’s so much masculine gray matter going to

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waste now. We women conserve what little sense we have, that 's—"

"Yes, yes, dear! So you do. Rarely use it lest you wear it out! All but my girl! That 's a master stroke, Jerry. I 'll do it right off! No, not right off, either. Christmas is only a month away—and I 'll wait. I declare, the thing is great—and it gets better every minute! It 's better than you know, child! That man, Steve Salisbury, is the best nigger in the parish. Stood pat for us all through the crevasse last week—and brought in lots of the best men and kept 'em working all night. I told him I 'd do him a good turn, first time I got a chance—and here it is!

"No, Jerry, I 'm glad you 're a girl. If you 'd been a boy, you 'd be out throwing away your great intellect—carousing—and my own master mind would n't have helped me out of this hole in a thousand years! I should never have known what

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to do with that damn—excuse me, daughter—that devilish woman! I ’ll send her over to Steve, bag and baggage, on Christmas Eve, with a deed of gift in her bandana—that ’s what I ’ll do!”

“And the boy, father?”

The old Judge scratched his bald spot.

“Yes, yes. Certainly, the boy,” he hastened to append. “Of course, it would n’t be treating him white to keep the boy—and give him Sassie. God knows what he sees in her—”

“That ’s his look-out, *pater*, dear. I often wonder what the partners in the mature romances about us see or ever saw in each other—and sometimes the outcome is surprising! That bow-legged baby of Sassie’s and Steve’s, now! Why, he ’s a wonder! Not two years old yet and he carries tunes and dances and claps time—”

“Yes, and he ’s got his daddy’s toes, too! All natural and straight inheritance. Sassie was born dancing. Your mind is all

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right, dear. Not the least too strong or masculine. You 'll do! Come, kiss your old father!"

Well, the upshot of it all was that on Christmas Eve following this quick decision, a wagon-load of effervescent joy was moved over from Belle Haven plantation to the house of Steve Salisbury, and "everything on the place was glad," if we are to believe the old women who talked it over in the road. Even several old roosters who had not crowed all season were seen lifting their combs as they sent forth their best bronchial joy-notes from the gate-posts about which recreant husbands had so recently gathered, and it is a fact that one or two of the neighbor-wives with whom Sassie had not been on speaking terms, did actually take the trouble to call and make their friendly adieux, so that the departure was in all ways most felicitous and when there went down the road into the sunset the contour of a heaped wagon,

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topped by a ruffled sunbonnet in outline, a peaceful calm settled upon the place where unrest had been.

For a time, things went fairly well at the Salisbury cabin. Sassie was pleased as a child with the novelty of everything and, although herself somewhat down at the heel, she was stylish and “fixy” to a degree and her free taste which ran to ornament soon transformed Steve’s house from a bare man-kept place into an abode of femininity in action, for she changed things around from day to day as caprice suggested and felt herself a great lady among the coast people.

And Steve was very happy—for a time. The woman’s touch and the all-pervading Boy, expressed in childish disorder everywhere, were like wine on draught to him. He was in a state of semi-intoxication with it all and, for a while, he declared he was afraid to go to sleep lest he should wake to find it a dream.

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As business had prospered, Steve had become somewhat punctilious about his dress. His shoes were always scrupulously polished on Saturday nights and his tubbings were as regular as his Sabbaths, but when spring days gave way to summer and Junior was playing about the "Parlor" barefoot, Steve's shoes began to pall on him. He kept thinking what a delight it would be, when customers would look at the child, as they constantly did, and say, "Fine child! *Yoze?*" he could giggle and answer, "Look at his foots!" And so did really this gleeful experience come to pass before the month of July had gone.

It was not a conspicuous thing to do. Etiquette is lax enough in plantation circles. It was only exceptional for Steve—inconsistent with his style and dress standards.

When Sassie had exhausted the novelty of her home, which is to say of her side of the house, the other being given over to

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business, she became restless. She had cleaned up—and polished—and scattered—and tied a good many ribbon bows on the cheap bric-a-brac which littered the place—and there seemed nothing further to do. The regular daily work of her small house was play to her quick faculty. These duties she turned off by a sort of magic so that she seemed always idle. With time thus heavy on her hands, what more natural than that she should go over and sit with Steve in the Studio Parlor, taking the boy with her when he was not already there. Of course, seeing it done, it was not long before her capable hands itched to work the stretcher, and then came the bright idea of her taking charge of this part of the business on the days when Steve was busy at the Branch.

The enterprise quickened her step and started the color in her cheek—and she declared that she was never so happy in her life.

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It was a festive little creature who presided at the Daisy Stretcher in those care-free days. She had lost no time after coming into her husband's home in sampling all of his hair lotions, and every shampoo known to his shelf had more and more liberated and lightened the strands of her red-brown hair which she wore quite free excepting for the band of gay ribbon which crossed her shapely pate with a great bow at either end, just above her small ears. Her slippers were generally as red as her turkey red gown. She liked red shoes as children like candy. Especially she liked them with the occasional gown of contrasting colors which would "show them off."

Her coming thus into the business was successful from the start—that is, of course, in a business way—and Steve expressed himself much pleased. Not that he ever found any money in the house, but there were new things—and new things—and new things—for Sassy was a great

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buyer and boasted that she "always knew what she wanted," which was generally what she happened to see.

In her interest in her share of the business, she even forgot to be jealous, and the fact is that if Steve's "patients" were generally women, the reverse was true of hers. It's a poor rule that won't work both ways!

It was surprising how many of the men began to be interested in their hair. Of course Steve took exclusive charge of his regular barber-shop. The lather and blade were not to Sassy's taste, even had the men wished her to use them, which they did not. There are some things better done by rule devoid of sentiment, and shaving is one of them. Few men would like to dream of having even the most charming of women fumbling over their faces with a razor. It would wake them up.

But Sassie looked well, her dress ranging in color through all the shades of hilarity,

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as she stood behind the "Daisy" and turning its crank, which she did in a way entirely novel. She would swing the entire heft of her slender body, in lieu of strength, upon it, hands and feet free, keeping her delicate poise until the trick was done. It was really a nice bit of gymnastics which many of the young men came purposely to see, even those who were leaving their kinks to their kinking. "Mis' Salisbury sho is good company!" was the general verdict and even her rather reticent husband was forced to allow, "Dey ain't nothin' lonesome when Sassie is around!"

That her temperament, in her life with its exposures, should have gotten her into trouble—well, how could it have been otherwise?

One of the most constant of the frequenters of "The Parlors" on her days was a splendid looking man, familiarly known along the coast as "Choctaw Charley," a fellow about, say, three-fifths Indian, the

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other two parts pure Congo—all negro as to feature and showing his preponderance of Indian blood only in a majestic figure of fine angles, a coppery tinge under his skin, and his straight hair, stiff as black bristles.

A stolid fellow he was, so protected by the wall of reticence which surrounded him that it was hard to know whether he was ultimately good or bad. Since the death, a few years back, of his handsome Indian-negro mother, he had lived alone in his hut between levees on the river's edge, where he presided over a set of shrimp nets, in season, and with his gun and skiff, brought in enough game and drift-wood to support the simple life he led. An independent, easy-going creature he had been, nothing seeming to disturb his equanimity until he fell into the snare of Sassie's red-ruffled temperament. A man like that is often ensnared by a woman like this. One day, Charley was sitting beside

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her—this was when he first began coming—vaguely wondering why she wore a red bow over one ear and a blue one above the other, when he remarked that it was getting late and he must go, to which she replied:

“Set still, man! I ’ll see dat it don’t git no later!” And with the words she kicked her red slipper across the room and stopped the clock.

A woman like this may be shocking, but she is not dull. Still, even as he sat under her spell, the surface of Choctaw Charley’s imperturbable nature remained calm. He simply stayed—and stayed—sitting for hours sometimes upon the long green sofa and practising his reticence upon her while Sassie played around him. He was much younger than Steve—better looking, athletic, strong, afraid of nothing—and he was always there, clean, sober, low of voice.

Sassie was a most indifferent mother—strange how often such are endowed with

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the sacred gift—and while she dressed Junior flashily, beat him to “teach him manners” and neglected him, she would fight any one who looked askance at him. A typical savage mammal of the human species she was, in fact, maternal only in fierce instinct of defense.

And so, when his father proposed taking the boy with him for his days at the Branch, she was glad to have him gone and she would always pack up an unconscionable lot of indigestible food for “his lunch,” to be eaten at odd hours during his absence. She liked rich food, herself, and the home table which she seemed to keep going by a sort of sleight of hand, fairly reeked with cloying sweets and pastries.

Reckless in her hospitality, she was one of those women whose lure lies largely in unreckoning generosity. She often said that she didn’t enjoy anything that she couldn’t share, and she would not hesitate, if he pleased her fancy, to invite to her

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larder a man who had come for a "ten-cent stretch" (her lowest fee), and send him home with fifty cents worth of "gilt edged victuals" inside his waistcoat—and she would feel that she was making money, at that.

Of course, the ten-cent service at the Daisy was slight and there were occasional dissatisfactions as when on one occasion, a "patient" complained, with embarrassment:

"I hates to say it, Mis' Salisbury, but de las' time you gi'e me a stretch, I paid you a good dime an' befo' I got home, everything had relapsed back ag'in."

"A *dime*, you say?" roared Sassie. "How long you reckon a dime would feed me befo' I 'd git hongry ag'in!" A rejoinder which passed for fine repartee and silenced the complainant with a chorus of mirth.

Junior was nearly six years old when a second child was born, a daughter this

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time, and the hard-worked husband who had lapsed into the humdrum of life, experienced a rejuvenation of sentiment in the new set of emotions awakened. A pretty little thing, she was, really quite exquisite in her diminutive perfections. Steve had somehow thought of the coming child as another boy, vainly threatening to "put Junior's nose out of joint," and so he had not at all foreseen how it would be. If any one had told him that a little thing, no bigger than a wax doll, could lay a wee hand over his sleeve and cast such a spell upon him that he would sit for hours, just watching it sleep and make faces — that through the nebulous power of this little thing, he would be so revived in conjugal tenderness as not only to relent in his recent strictures as to the squandering of money but would actually himself go out and recklessly buy great piles of red embroidery and lace and fringe, "just to have in the house for his 'pretty things,' "

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before the daughter was two days old — if any one had foretold such “softy behavior,” he would not have believed it.

So rapt was he in his hovering devotion to the babe that he did not, for a long time, realize the mother’s impatience of his continual presence in the house. And even when she finally complained between pouting and laughter that she “always did hate a Miss Nancy-of-a-man, hanging round the house forever,” he only laughed and said, “Dat ’s de truth. Dey ain’t no money in dis business. I mus’ be up an’ gittin’—an’ rake in money for my growin’ fam’ly!”

And so things soon fell again into the old routine which was very little changed by the coming of another child. When Sassie went back to her duties at the stretcher—she would go, in spite of Steve’s remonstrance—Choctaw Charley was in evidence as before and no one seemed to pay much attention to them. It was he who pushed the old perambulator all redone in pink

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and white into the "studio parlor," with the new baby when she stirred; it was he who ran to see whether she were opening or closing her eyes. He it was who lifted her out and held her in the palm of his hand aloft and showed her the moon through the open window; he who, as she grew older, threw her up to the ceiling and caught her every time; he who took things from her left hand and placed them in the right—and it was to him that she first held out her baby arms.

She liked the "daddy-man," too, and would let him hold her on his knee—but then Charley was never around at these times and daddy-man did very well for second best. And the "second best" knew that as between him and the mother, he was first, unless she were ill—or hungry—and it gave zest to his already perfect joy in her.

She was a witching little thing of nearly three, standing in Charley's lap as he sat

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in the "studio" window, one day, when Steve came upon them unexpectedly. Her little head, turned coyly, lay against that of the man and as she turned quickly, recognizing his footsteps as he approached from behind, Steve got a swift picture of the two profiles, one against the other. It was only a flash but the revelation was vivid—and final. In this brief presentment, he clearly saw what only love-blindness had hitherto denied him.

Involuntarily, he put his hand before his eyes—and he staggered so that he would have fallen but for Charley who led him to a chair. Then he and Sassie, seeing him ill, together laid him at length upon the green sofa and Sassie hysterically drenched him with cold water and called upon God to "have mercy upon her." And presently the man opened his eyes and said he was better and wanted to be still. "Would they leave him alone for a little while?"

How often had he teased his wife about

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her unconsciously straightening her own child's hair by prenatal thought—and the impression of “seeing it done every day” and even doing it herself! And the woman had laughed and told of how this or that neighbor had “marked a child”—by fright or insistent thought.

It was not only the straight Indian hair, or the coppery tinge, so effective in the baby cheek. It was not this feature—or that. It was the repeated Choctaw type—this and more. The small face was in its entirety, a replica of the other.

There was nothing to be said. He had been living in a fool's paradise and an angel with a flaming sword had cast him out—and the door was forever closed.

He was pretty still about the house all that evening, only hovering about his boy—and silently looking from one face to another of the three who breathed with him in the room.

He rose early next morning, before sun-

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rise, and started forth—to the cabin among the wood-piles on the river.

Choctaw Charley was up before him and sat on the levee, examining his nets.

There was a gleam of sudden terror in the Indian's steady eyes when first he saw the man—and he rose to his height. Then, perceiving the calm face of his early guest, he put forth his hand, which Steve affected not to see. Looking the Indian evenly in the eyes for a full minute, he drawled:

“How much'll you pay me for her, Charley?”

A grunt was the only reply. A short, ugly “Huh!”

And Steve spoke again:

“I done asked you a question, Choctaw Charley. I say what'll you gimme for her?”

“You gwine *sell yo' wife*, Steve?”

“NO,” the man thundered, “I gwine git my divo'cemint papers out'n de co't-house—an' den I gwine *sell my slave!*”

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And he lowered his eyes and took in the Indian's face.

"How much you want for her?" Charley's eyes flinched as he put the question.

"*What you got?*" The retort was immediate and it cut like a knife.

"What I got? I got—I got—I got—I got a few—"

"Never mind about de few—tell me what you got, I say."

"I got my skift—an' my gun—an' dis fishin' truck—an' my watch—an' deze is my wood-piles, an—"

"How much you got *in money?*"

The red man hesitated.

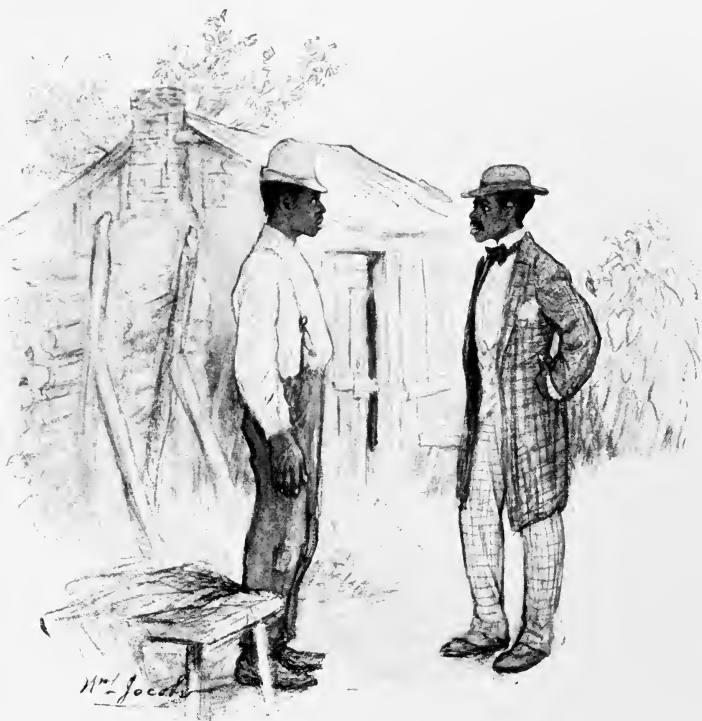
"Talk, Charley. It's gittin' late. How much money you got?"

"I got three hundred an' ninety odd dollars."

"Is dat all?"

"Yas, dat 's all," and the eyes he lifted were clear. It was all.

"Well," said Steve. "I'll take it."



“How much ’ll you pay me for her, Charley?”



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His voice was steady and controlled. He might have been dickering for a horse.

“Yas,” he repeated, in a moment. “I ’ll take it—I ’ll take de money, but you can keep yo’ things. You ’ll need ’em.

“An’ now, don’t you dast to show yo’ face on de plantation tel you hear f’om me. I’ll give it out dat you ’s sick—an *you is sick!* You hear me? **YOU IS SICK!**”

“Yas, I hear. *I is sick.*”

“Well, dat ’s fixed. I ’m gwine straight up to de co’t-house f’om heah, an’ ef I git my papers to-day, you ’ll heah f’om me some time to-night. Ef not, to-morrow—or nex’ day—or nex’ day—or nex’ day—but tel you see me heah, please ricollec’ *you ’s laid up!* You onderstand?”

“Yas, I onderstand.”

“An’ nobody f’om my house ’ll trouble you tel I sesso. Have de money counted out for me—an’ when it ’s paid in, you

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kin call 'round an' git yo' prop'ty. An' dat's all."

"Dat's all?" repeated the Indian, but he spoke with a rising inflection noting which, the husband turned back.

"What mo'?" he asked.

For answer, the Indian only lifted his hand, measuring from the ground the height of a little child, and his eyes were full of sorrow.

"We each keeps our own." Steve's voice was softer as he answered. "De law would give her to me. I owns de mother an' de law 'titles me to *her increase*. But I can't handle sech as dat. Hit's too little—*an' too big*. I'd ruther let it slip through my fingers. I'm sel-lin' you de mammy—an' I'll give de chile her freedom.

"An' ricollec', Choctaw Charley—you's sick, an' I's yo' medicine-man—an' my perscription for you is to *stay heah tel you heah f'om me, you heah?*"

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And slowly withdrawing his eyes, the aggrieved man turned away.

.
It was the third night after this, about sundown, when Steve reappeared at the river cabin. He found Charley standing bare-headed on the bank—waiting for him—stolid, quiet, patient. As the evening sun shone on his head, Steve seemed to see a diminutive counterpart of it beside it against the sky—and it did not make his task easy. Still, his voice gave no sign of shock as he said, when he had come up to the man:

“Well—everything is settled—an’ done.”

The Indian turned his slow eyes, inquiringly.

“De divo’ce-paper—a’ready?” he said.

“No. I did n’t have to git no divo’ce-paper. De Jedge say dat yaller, bow-legged Baptis’ preacher dat married us, he did n’t register it down on de books—an’

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he warn't no reg'lar ardainded preacher, nohow—an' so he say de marriage is annulded an' avoided—an' now it's dissolved by its own acid. An' dat leaves us free."

"So she nuver is blonged to you, by rights?"

"She blonged to me by matrimony, but not by ceremony, he say, an' he say dat matrimony widout legal ceremony won't stan' befo' de law."

"*Den what is you sellin' me?*" There was a mean look in the Indian's face for just a minute, as he put the question.

Steve bent and looked him in the eye.

"I tol' you de yether day what I was sellin' you, Choctaw Charley." His voice was like steel now. "I 'm a-sellin' you *my slave*. Leastways, dat was what I started out to do. But I can't do it, man. I done changed my mind. De boy, he likes her. He likes her even wid me—an' ef he's sick, he likes her above me

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—an' she 's his mammy. I can't sell my boy's mammy. But I tell you what I 'll do; I 'll pass 'er along to you de way she was passed to me. Ole Jedge Hungerford deeded 'er to me for a Christmas-gif'—an' I 'll do de same by you. Dat is I 'll give her to you for a gif', an' you kin date it to suit yo'self. Good Friday is de nex' holiday, but—nemmine about dat, an'—"

"An' I cert'n'y is thankful to—" Charley began, but Steve shut him off.

"Wait, man," he interposed. "Don't be thankful too quick. I 'm a-comin' to dat three hundred an' odd dollars. I won't sell de woman, but de price of de chile is per-zac'ly whatever money you got. You see?"

"Yas, I see."

"Go, git it!" Steve blurted, with an abrupt motion with his thumb toward the cabin.

Obediently, the Indian went in and brought a long stocking, filled.

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“Count it.”

But as the man began to empty the coins upon the ground—coins and little bundles of green paper—Steve stopped him.

“Dat ’ll do,” he said; “How much is dey?”

“Three hundred an’ ninety-nine dollars an’ forty-five cents.”

“Make it fo’ hundred,” said Steve.

“How?” He threw up two empty hands.

“Fetch de change when you comes for de goods—an’ now, put de money in my saddle-bag, yonder,” and while the Indian obeyed, he followed, preparing to mount.

When the money was safely bestowed, Steve handed over to the Indian the deed of conveyance of woman and child and rose into the saddle.

“Now, you ain’t seen her for three days, Charlie,” he said, as he took the reins, “an’—”

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“How you know?” glared the man.

“I know, *caze I know*. I fixed it so I ’d be sho’, befo’ I lef’ home. I told ’er I had passed by yo’ cabin an’ dat you was sick, an’ threatenin’ to break out—but I *was n’t sho’ ef it was de small-pox!* No, you ain’t seen her, *not her!* I don’t like to lie, mo ’n I have to. I did n’t say positive dat you *had* de small-pox. I did n’t need to.

“An’ I ain’t nuver mentioned none o’ dis business to her. She don’t know no mo ’n what she mought o’ guessed dat day, when hell opened to me—an’ she ’s a poor guesser.

“An’ now, you can come for her—an’ de chile—on Saturday, not befo’. An’ when you come, you kin tell ’er de news an’ show ’er de paper. I ain’ gwine broach it to ’er. I gwine migrate—me an’ my son—an’ by Saturday about sundown, we’ll be far f’om heah. Dis place don’t suit me, nohow. Dey ain’t money enough

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in it. I gwine whar dey 's dollars in circulation, stid o' dimes—an' work de Daisy whar she 'll make us rich,—an' I reckon dat 's all I got to say. Clk! Clk!"

This last to the horse started him homeward. There were no further words between the men—no comments—no recriminations—no adieux.

The affair was closed.

From here, Steve soon turned his horse toward the Branch road. He would not go back home. It was easier to stay away.

.
In the early forenoon of the next day, while he was busying himself in quiet preparations for departure, putting his things away, a messenger came for him—a messenger who would have been pale had he not been so brown. As it was, Steve saw at a glance that he was a tragedy-bearer,—saw it by the ashen hue of his lips, saw it before his words gave him the lie, as he said:

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“Better come home, Steve. Mis’ Salisbury ain’t so well.”

“Who killed ’er?” The story of death was written all over the man’s face.

“I don’t know, sir. Dey foun’ ’er daid. De doctor, he say she been daid all night.”

“Where?”

“In her house. In yo’ house. In her bed.”

“An’ de boy? De chillen?”

“Dey all right. De boy ’ll tell you.”

.
And so did he, straight and without a falter.

It seems that the little girl had climbed and was curiously handling the things on Steve’s shelf, in the barber-shop, when she opened a box of razors and her mother, instead of getting them from her tactfully, tried to force them and in the struggle, one of the blades swept across the woman’s wrist, severing an artery.

“Blood spurted *so high*, in jumps,”

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said the boy, “an’ mammy fainted dead away, same as when she gets happy in church—an’ when she come to, she tried to get up—an’ she tried to get up—an’ she tried to get up—an’ ’en *she went to sleep*. An’ ’en we-all, we went to sleep—an’ dis mornin’, she would n’t wake up—an’ she would n’t wake up.”

Such was the pitiful story. Sally Ann had always swooned at the sight of blood—and the rest is easy to follow.

The news spread fast enough. It was about noon when Choctaw Charley came in. Of course, he had heard every version of the tragedy on the way.

The little body, dressed for burial, lay, a tranquil form in yellow wax, upon the green sofa.

As Charley stood, looking down upon it, his head low upon his bosom, Steve came and stood beside him. Neither spoke. Then, presently, the children came. The wee girl in scarlet twisted one hand

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through Charley's and the other she lay against Steve's knee—and the boy pressed his cheek against his father's arm and his lip quivered.

After a while, Steve said to the man beside him:

“Maybe it 's all for de best, Charley.”

But Choctaw Charley, Charley of the stolid mind, could not answer. His face was set. And when presently a single great tear rolled down his face, he threw it away roughly with his empty hand.

“Come into the other room,” said Steve, after a while, and when they were there, “Charley,” he said, “dat money—I don't want it. I 'lowed to save it for de little gal. I knowed her mammy could n't nuver exac'ly save money—not sayin' nothin' ag'in' 'er—but it 's for you, now, an' for her.”

Still Charlie was dumb. He could not talk—yet. He might have been of stone.

But next day, when the funeral was over,

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the two men walked home together. Then, while they sat in the front room—not the “Studio Parlor” but the other—her parlor on the other side—a little room still palpitant with the spirit of its vanished mistress, and while the children laughed together beside them, it was Charley who said:

“Seem like a pity to part ’em. Nobody knows nothin’ but you an’ me.”

Steve shot a quick glance at the man.

“An’ would you be willin’—”

“Keep dat money, Steve—an’ do for ’er—an’ I’ll come up wid more as she needs it. You kin do mo’ for ’er ’n I kin. You got people—an’ I ain’t. An’ she won’t nuver know—an’ I’ll come—or whar you go, I’ll be close behind. You know, she loves me the best—an’ you won’t min’ dat—jes’ lemme keep up wid ’er a little, an’—”

While they were talking along, so, the children who were eating their corn-bread



“Seem like a pity to part ’em”



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and molasses, under the lamp, started to ask questions. It was Junior who began it.

“Jes look at all de big moths, daddy—fallin’ into de lamp. Who made de moths, daddy?”

“Dod!” put in the wee girl. “Dod maked everyfing. Mammy said so.”

“An’ when dey drops in de candle, whar does dey go *den*?” pursued the boy.

“Back to God, baby.”

“Back to Dod? Everyfing back to Dod?” And Junior, his eyes alight, added, “Ole hoppy-toad frogs—an’ pritty butterflies—all back to God?”

“An’ red mammies—all back—?”

“Yas, chillen.”

“I ’m sheepy,” said the little red-winged moth, “wusht I could go back to-night—to Dod—an’ mammy.”



A CASE IN DIPLOMACY

A CASE IN DIPLOMACY,

I HAD been writing Joshua's love letters for him all winter, and, after the first two or three, in the construction of which I had dutifully consulted him, it seemed better simply to take the temper of the fellow's mood and to let it color effusions which were entirely my own in form.

If he seemed timorous, gray was the hue of my plaint. A jubilant spirit flowered my pages with *couleur de rose* when he was fond and sure; while, in a situation which warranted so reckless declaration as "love by po'try-verse," as he expressed it, I fell easily into rime, made to the need or frankly borrowed—to his unfailing delight.

It is well understood among my negroes

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that I am pleased to act as amanuensis when I can. As my professional duties claim much of my time, I rather welcome this confidential service which brings me into personal acquaintance with them, so that when questions are referred to me, as master of the place, I may arbitrate wisely, knowing my material—whether the well-springs be sweet or bitter.

The negro is peculiarly sensitive to the effect of high-sounding language far beyond his ken, following flowery lines above his own head with keen delight—and a general if not full understanding.

I shall never forget the first time Joshua came to me with his request. Thinking to write strictly by his dictation, I said, as I reached for my pen:

“Well, Josh, I ’m ready. What shall I say?”

Instead of answering, the boy began to squirm and to giggle and it was some time before I could get a coherent utterance

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from him; but finally, after a number of ejaculatory spurts, such as “De idee! An’ you a educated ge’man o’ speunce—He, he, he!” he turned to me with:

“G’way, Marse Horace—g’way! *You axin me* what to write—he, he!—Ef I knowed college words, you reckon I ’d come to you?”

And so it was that, after some parley on the subject, I said, dipping my pen:

“I believe you said her name was Juney—so, shall I begin with ‘My dear Juney?’ ”

This sobered him. He stopped giggling:

“No, Sir! Not yit! Not on paper!”

“Not on paper? Then how shall I make a letter of it?”

“Now, Marse Horace! You knows what I means! De paper ’s all right, but look out what you puts on it! Don’t, for Gord sake, say ‘my dear’! De gal ain’t signified her consents, yit! Mo ’n dat, I ain’t approached de neighborhoods o’ ma’iage—not yit!

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“Dis heah letter ain’t no mo ’n a sort o’ he-bird chirp, me settin’ on my limb an’ she on hern, in de love-vine. Ef—ef I was to say ‘my dear’ now, what would be lef’ to me to sing time we starts to build de nest?”

The boy’s sentiment surprised and pleased me.

“Quite right you are,” I replied. “Quite right! Then what *shall* I say? If not ‘my dear,’ I suppose it shall be just ‘Juney’ or ‘Miss Juney’?”

“She name ‘Miss Littlejohn.’” The amendment was serious. “What’s de matter wid ‘Dear Miss Littlejohn,’ for a letter? Sech as ‘Dear Juney,’ I keeps for speech!”

“Keep that for speech, do you?” I laughed. “I hardly think you need my help, Joshua.”

“Yas, Sir, I does! I sho does! I needs it severe! When I say I keeps it for speech, I means for future speech. I ain’t



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“No, sir! Not yit! Not on paper!”

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nuver is said no sech to her *yit*. I don't nuver see 'er on'y but jes' Sundays. But every Sunday of Gord's world I walks dem 'leven deep miles, all charged with language—den de first sight of 'er, seem like hit all but strikes me dumb. I been gwine up to Three Forks now for purty nigh fo'teen Sundays, I reckon, ef dey was counted, an' I ain't nuver is done nuthin' but set down beside 'er an' mop my forehead—an', of co'se, present 'er wid de gum-drops or rock-candy I fetches 'er—an' seem like she's purty much de same way. She'll talk right along, jes as long as anybody else is in de room—but—but quick as we's lef' by ourselves, we bofe falls back on rock-candy an' gum-drops—an' sweet-gum, of co'se. An' den, de fus' thing I knows, de 'larm clock strikes—an' I has to strike out for home."

"And who sets the alarm?" I asked, amusement in my voice, in spite of me.

"We does—she or me, air one. We has

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to reg'late ourselves by it. Hit's de on'iest way I kin be sho o' gittin' home befo' day.

"I don' know how it is, but seem like settin' beside a gal an' chewin' gum is slow work an' yit dey ain't nothin' dat 'll mek time fly lak it do. Seem like quick as we starts in, de clocks gits excited an' rushes us along into a sort o' Paradise-gyarden whar we loses our way. Oh, yas, Sir—we sho needs de 'larm-clock. Most o' de plantation house-co'tin' is reg-lated by 'larm-clocks. Hit lets you take comfort wid a gal, a 'larm clock do."

"Then, shall I begin with 'Miss Littlejohn'?" I interrupted.

"Dey ain't no harm in 'Dear Miss Littlejohn,' is dey? Dat's on'y manners in writin', so dey tell me. Even de shoe-maker wha' duns you for a pair o' brogans 'll write you down, 'Dear Sir.'"

Joshua was no fool.

"Well," said I, actually beginning to

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write, "Now I have that—'Dear Miss Littlejohn'—what else?"

More giggling—and then:

"'Befo' Gord, Marse Horace, even de name of 'er whilst you say it, seem like it summonses 'er befo' me an' strikes me dumb. My language is clean gone an' I almost finds myself feelin' in my pocket for de chewin'-gum. Don't 'terrogate me, please, Sir. Jes' write it along smooth—datin' from de gum."

And so I did, although I could not wholly suppress my amusement when I replied:

"Comfortable, but not very progressive, this chewing-gum romance—I should say."

The words were above his head I knew and yet, not wholly, for he replied without hesitation:

"'I s'pec' it do seem like gwine roun' an' roun' de mulberry-bush, to set an' chew ag'inst time, but hit 's brung me de on'iest encouragemint I 's foun', so fer, yit.

"You see, when I comes away, one time

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I'll take bofe gums an' chew 'em all de week; an' de nex' Sunday she takes 'em. De two wads togedder ain't any too much for solitude.

"She got 'em dis week an' dat 's huc-come I walks wid a lighter step. Ef she didn't lean todes me consider'ble, she would n't chew after me. Fus' time she tuk an' tuk de gum, she toss 'er haid an' she say to me, she say:

" 'Joshuay,' she say, 'you won't have no secrets f'om me by nex' Sunday when you come. I gwine chew all yo' thoughts out 'n yo' wad o' gum,' she say."

"Pretty good, for a silent girl," I laughed. "And what did you say to that?"

"Say?" he chuckled. "'T war n't no time for speech. I jes—ne'mine what I done, Marse Horace! I could n't help myse'f—an' she lookin' so mischievious, chewin' out my thoughts. Sir? He, he! Yas, Sir—dat what I done; huc-come you

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sech a good guesser? No, no—not in de mouf—jes' two or three times anywhar I 'd strike 'er 'bout's 'er face. Dat 's to be expected!

“But go on wid de letter, please, Sir. You got de ‘Dear Miss Littlejohn. Now I takes my pen in han’—’ ”

It took two hours to write that first letter—but at the end of the time, I knew my man pretty well. Every expression was held in question and threshed out. And so, after several similar efforts at dictation compromised to collaboration, I finally learned to turn out love letters done to a turn which delighted both Josh and his secretary. How the “Nut Brown mayde” liked them it would be hard to say. So far as I know, they were never answered.

The fellow had been sending her something like a letter every week for several months when, one day, he came to me, looking troubled.

“Marse Horace,” he complained, while

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he fanned himself with his hat, a sure sign of embarrassment, "Marse Horace, I jes' called in to-day to ax you to please, Sir, git me engaged, ef you please, Sir. Dis everlastin' letter business, hit keep a see-sawin', but seem like hit don't git nowhar! An' I's tired o' dat twenty-mile pull up to Three Forks an' back every Sunday. Dey's been Sundays when it's been drizzly an' raw when I'd 'a' rested off f'om de trip ef she war n't in sech a beehive o' yong fellers, all watchin' to see me slow up—an' of co'se I wouldn't vacate dat honeysuckle bench, an' dey every one eager to take my place. So, for Gord sake, Marse Horace, *engage us right away!*"

This was delightful and needless to say, all that I could instil of the impetuous lover not to be denied, went into the next effusion—and the thing was done.

I wish I had a copy of this proposal letter. My recollection of it is far from clear, but I know it breathed of passionate

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appeal and I do recall a certain pride in the rime with which it closed, especially in its second line, made to fit an extraordinary mouth. I hope never to forget Joshua's delight in the verses which went about like this:

An' so, my on'iest angel, Juney,
I wooes you for yo' life-long smile!
I is yo' lover, soft an' spooney,
I 's traveled many a weary mile—

In every kind o' wind an' weather
I's plowed the road twixt you an' me,
So, let us jine our lives together—
For time an' for eternitee!

“How would ‘Amen’ do, to finish it slick?” chuckled the boy, while tears of mingled emotion surprised his eyes. And so it was made to end:

—For time and for eternitee

Amen!

A few days after this, Joshua confided to me that he had given the girl a ring which

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he was hiring at twenty-five cents a month and when I asked him why he had not bought it outright, he scratched his head, while he chuckled:

“You see, Marse Horace, hit ’s dis-away: S’posin’ I was to pay cash for de ring an’ den she ’d jilt me off! I don’t want no dead wood on my hands. No, Sir! I ’lows to wait an’ see how dis ingagemint *washes!* Ef it proves to be *fast color*, I done made my ’rangements at de sto’e to have de ring-rent go on to de buyin’-price—twelve dollars—an’ hit ’s fine gold, reel *rolled-gold* de man say—rolled out pyore, an’ *gua’anteed good for a long married life!*”

For a while after this, I saw less of Joshua. The fuller understanding seemed to preclude the need of the midweek assurance, which I interpreted as a favorable sign. There might easily be something too sacred in the ripened romance for transcription by a third party.

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So I had put the matter by, when, one day, I chanced to hear that the girl, Juney, had come up to work on land adjoining Joshua's field and the affair seemed wholly flourishing. Thus several months passed.

There were many practical reasons why it seemed well enough for them to defer the marriage. Although he was an industrious fellow, Joshua was but a lad and he was only beginning life. He did not own even his mule and he had entered upon the purchase of the few acres of land he cultivated only at my earnest solicitation. In my limited experience, I have found that a deed to a bit of land is a great moral force, even the deed prospective being a stimulus to industry and saving.

The girl, Juney, was one of a large family and her wages were always collected by a step-father several times removed, who applied them to the support of the brood—all, also "one half remove" from full sister and brotherhood. When Juney

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wanted a new gown or a pair of shoes, it was matter for family consultation and often of dispute and the Sunday finery she wore to Joshua's undoing was all second-hand, earned by odd jobs done overtime or on holidays.

So the winter passed and I had not thought of the lovers for months when one day the boy surprised me by another visit and a first glance at his troubled face showed me that things were not going well with him. I greeted him cheerfully, however:

“Well, this is like old times! How goes it, Josh? Not getting back to letter-writing, are you?”

For answer, he dropped limply upon the steps at my feet, and, fanning with the fragment of felt which answered for a hat, he began:

“Please, Sir, ax me to set down, Mars-ter. I needs yo' counsel—to lif' my sper-its—”

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And just at this moment, it happened that a mocking-bird in the vine almost at my elbow sent out a great, jubilant song. It was so brave, so daring and so triumphant that it compelled attention, even breaking the boy's sentence so that he could not but look upward.

"There are two there—and they are carrying straws," I began, when the singer gave me a clearing, looking into the boy's face as I spoke,

"And I thought of you, Josh, when I watched them yesterday. May is love's month, you know—and it's nearly here. You remember what you said about building your nest—you and Juney—"

The fellow put up his hand in protest.

"Don't, Marse Horace, for Gord sake, don't! I can't stand it. No, Sir, s'cuse me sayin' so, but I sho can't stand it!

"You axed me jes now does I desire to write a letter an' my reply to you is Yas, Sir—I sho does. Dat's what brung me

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heah. My courage is all dismounted—an' I needs you to write me a letter, sho—an' it mus' be a scorcher at dat!"

I lit a cigar, deliberately while I said:

"What 's the trouble? Better begin at the beginning and tell me about it."

"Dey ain't no beginnin' to it, Sir—nor no een—but dey 's trouble enough, all de same! An' no trouble, nuther—I wush dey was trouble—hit would smooth my way. I can't sleep good at night—an' I 'se so sleepy all day—an' seem like I done los' intruss in life—an' ain't got no appetite to work—an'—an'—an'—"

"About five grains of quinine, three times a day, Josh," I said slowly. "You 're malarial, boy." But seeing that my words distressed him, I instantly repented and thinking to strike the seat of the disorder, I asked: "How 's Juney?"

"She 's very well, I thank you, Sir. Dey ain't nothin' wrong wid Juney. I wush dey was somethin' wrong wid 'er,

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so I 'd have occasion to quar'l. I mought as well out wid it—I come to git you to write a letter to Juney, please, Sir. I wants to be *disingaged!*''

“To what?” I cried. “You 're joking, man.”

“No, Sir, I ain't jokin'—an' I wants you to write de *disingagin' letter*. I can't broach it to 'er by word o' mouth—an' dat 's huccome I come to you ag'in. Make it short an' swif'. Tell 'er dat I can't afford to marry! Tell 'er I 'se dead broke—dat I done failed in business!”

“But you have n't, boy. You are doing finely—made a good crop—and a first payment—and she knows it—and—”

“Cert'n'y, she knows it—an' dat 's what I wants. Ef she thought I was sho 'nough dead broke, I 'd nuver git shet of 'er. You know women, Marse Horace—an' you knows how my-color women *is!* Dey favorite occupation is bendin' dey backs over wash-tubs to suppo't a no-account man—

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jes' for love! No, Sir, I wants to put up a fus class bluff—an' she 'll know whar I stands! Let 'er down sudden—but break de fall!

"An' put it in de letter dat she 's welcome to keep dat installmint ring ef she 'll complete de payments."

"Why, Joshua!" I was really ashamed of the fellow. "I am surprised. I thought you would be more generous."

"So I is generous, Marse Horace—so I is generous! Ef I was mean, or *jes jus'*, I 'd finish dem payments myself an' take de ring to bestow on my next ch'ice. Dey ain't but two dollars due on it an' ef she wants to buy it in for dat amount, she 's welcome.

"But, *for Gord sake, git me disingaged, Marster! I 'se clair wo'e out!*"

"You haven't told me about it, yet. What's the trouble? Isn't she true—and affectionate?"

"Oh, yas, Sir—yas, Sir—No, Sir—dey

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ain't nothin' to tell. Juney, she's all right. She's too good for me, I reckon—an' maybe dat's all de trouble. I feels like a starched shirt after a rain—an' you know hit's onpossible for sech as dat to put up a bold front. Hit's boun' to give in.

“So long as I was losin' my shoes in dem miles o' sticky mud every Sunday, I'd 'a' died for her. When dey was twenty-nine men elbowin' one another to git a look at 'er—an' one or two razor-fights a week—”

“You must n't expect to have things all your own way,” I submitted, gently; “you know the old saying, ‘The course of true love never runs smooth.’ ”

“Yas, Sir, I knows dat! Dat what I say. Hit's runnin' too smooth—too damn smoo'—s'cuse me, Marster; I ain't got de polite language to dicorate dis case to its needs an' I don' know what to say.

“Talkin' about Juney, I spec' she's

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about de bes' gal on dis plantation, ef not on de whole Orange Turn—an' dat makes de way hard for me. Soon as she come up heah, she give out to all de yether boys dat she was my fy-an-say—an' she ain't nuver is looked at nobody else—an' she do all my mendin' for me—an' she sho do make me walk a chalk—she sho do. She's even started keepin' my money for me—an' she's got me dat stingy I almos' begrudges 'er de bottle o' ginger-pop I treats 'er to on Sadday nights—she's so set on savin' for de house-keepin'. Why, I ain't wo'e dat duck suit you gimme but once-t dis last season—an' dat time, she done it up for me—an' she ain't nuver is brought it back. She say dey ain't no use wastin' it on her. Tell de truth, I ain't got nothin' ag'in' de gal—an' I 'd do anything I could for 'er—in reason. But, befo' Gord, I done los' my taste for 'er, dat's all—

“So, now you knows de case in full,

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please to write de letter—an' make it straight and strong!"

There is pathos to be found in every life-story, if we follow it far enough. 'I felt sorry for the lad and yet I could not forget the other party to the comedy—comedy which has ever its tragedy note—and so my mind reverted to the girl, the absent, the over-sure—the rejected. And my next plea was for her:

"And how will Juney take this, Joshua?"

He removed his hat again—and began fanning:

"Dat 's some'h'n' I can't allow myse'f to study about, Marse Horace. Dat 's her een o' de line."

"Yes, it is her end of the line—but you threw her the line, didn't you? Suppose you think this thing over? You 've got tired being engaged. There 's nothing new in that. But when people get tired being engaged, they generally get married—for

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a change. My advice to you is to go and hurry up the wedding. I 'm sending Jim Herricks and his wife down to work in the sorghum field and that leaves their cabin vacant and I was thinking the other day that you and Juney might like to move in there—there 's a nice little garden-patch there, and—you 've got a neat little balance to your credit. Draw out enough to finish paying for that ring—and to buy a few necessary things, and—

“And, by the way, does Juney know you owe for the ring?”

“Yas, Sir—she knows it, all right! Dat is, she knows it now. I told 'er las' Chuesday night when we was walkin' home f'om prayer-meetin'. She had stood up an' give 'er speunce in chu'ch—tol' how happy she was wid love sekyore in 'er life an' all sech as dat—an' somehow, she seemed *jes a little too s'rene in 'er mind*—so I up an' told 'er I was behin' in my payments on de ring, an' one thing led to another tel

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I had out wid de entire story—how I had rented it tel we could sample de ingagement. But I could n't make 'er mad, no ways. She 'lowed dat dat was a good plan. Ef I could git 'er hoppin' mad one time, I mought up an' marry 'er endurin' de riconcilement.

“But dey ain't no use, now. Dis ingagement is played out by too fair a season, same as you see de cotton fields do, some peaceful yeahs, when everything seems goin' along heavenly an' de fields start to swivel up, f'om pyore lack o' conterdiction. For a fine crop, gimme enough too-colds an' too-hots an' too-wets an' too-drys to egg on de growth. Dis nachel death f'om heart-failin' is a hopeless complaint.

“I ain't nuver is got drunk, but dey 's been times lately, good religious times at dat, when seem like I could understand how some fool men does git drunk—jes to break step!

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“So, write de letter, please, Sir—an’ I ’ll call for it about dis time to-morrer—*a rousin’ disingagin’ letter—no ifs or buts to it!*”

The announcement of dinner put an end to our interview and the boy went home, but as he turned down the walk, I called to him: “Not to-morrow, Joshua. Come in again on Saturday, and I ’ll be ready for you.”

I wanted time to make some inquiries about the girl whom he was throwing over, and to study the situation a little. I had heard only the best reports of Juney as a worker and Josh was an exceptional hand, industrious, peaceable and apparently honest, and, in my association with him through his pathetic romance, I had grown fond of the boy.

And I sympathized with him in his dilemma more than I would confess, being a man myself and realizing the exhilaration of pursuit. But, even more sensibly, I

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knew the luxury of surrender—of love in the house—of home and the peace of fulfilment—and so my championship of the woman was largely in the man's interest, after all.

This interview was on Wednesday. I had allowed myself three days for investigation and reflection.

In the late afternoon of the day following this, Thursday, I was sitting in my accustomed place on the veranda, smoking, as usual, while I chewed the cud of speculation variously, for Joshua's was not the only tangle which I was interested in straightening.

The sun was low and when I saw the outline of a slender girl against the crimson and perceived that she was approaching from the "quarters road," it did not occur to me that it might be Juney until she was quite up to me and had spoken:

"Jedge Ransom," she courtesied low as she spoke, "dis is Juney Littlejohn f'om

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Three Forks—and I called to ax you, please, Sir, ef I mought have de liberty to consult wid you—about—”

“About Joshua?” I interrupted, delight in my voice.

“No, Sir—not about Joshuay—dis time.” And when she spoke his name, standing in the low sunlight, I fancied that I saw a swift bronzing of the yellow of her cheek. But only for a moment, for she had soon recovered herself, and she spoke clearly, if her voice did falter a little:

“I sca’cely knows how to ’splain de case out to you, Jedge—but—but I was bleegeed to come myself or else send some tattletale—on private business—so I come—

“An’ I wants to ax you, Jedge, is you got a license to marry, dis yeah?”

This was startling—marriage, and Joshua not in it!

“I have n’t a license, exactly—but, as judge of this circuit, I do perform the civil

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ceremony, sometimes. Would you mind telling me who may need my services?"

"Me, Sir," in voice scarcely audible.

"When?"

"To-morrow night."

"You and—who else?"

At this, she threw a timorous glance over her shoulder and even further lowered her voice.

"Me an' Sam Slydel," bronzing again.

"Sam Slydel of Three Forks? The well-digger with the cross—?"

"Yas, Sir—dat 's him."

"Mh—hm! Yes, I see. I don't like to ask it, Juney, but you are not exactly a stranger to me, you know, although I have never seen you until now—and I am interested in you. You see, I am in court a good deal and I hear a good many things about people who get into trouble. Has n't this Sam Slydel been—has n't he been in jail?"

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“He don’t min’ dat.” She looked up now.

“But I was thinking of you. As his wife, you would mind it.”

“He ’s out, now—an’ he say he nuver is stole all dem chickens, nohow. Dey was others besides Sam in dat chicken mixtry.”

And then, she added, glancing again behind her:

“An’ dis is a secret business, Jedge Ransom, please, Sir. Sam wrote me word by letter dat I better call an’ see you myself—but he charged me not to tell you who I was gwine marry. Dat ’s what I git for tellin’ all I knows.”

“I shall not betray your confidence, Juney. There is no secret about a man’s being in jail for chicken-stealing—and I wished to be sure that the woman he married should know it. And then, as I told you just now, I have been hearing a great deal of you from Joshua. Would you mind

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telling me what has happened between you and him?"

"Ain't nothin' p'tic'lar happened. I jes got tired. I come down heah las' fall. I swapped fields wid a gal wha' was keepin' company wid a Three Forks boy—an' took her field jes so Josh would n't have to take cold in all dat sof' suction mud, walkin' it twice-t every Sunday—an' I craved to see de world, anyhow.

"So, ef me an' Sam comes over heah to-morrer night about dis time, you 'll tie de knot, will you, Sir? He done swo' he would take me back 'Mis' Slydel,' ef de court knows itse'f—an' I don't want no fights. Joshuay done whupped him out three times a'ready—an' I know he 'll come armed—wid gun and razors. Joshuay ain't nuver is had no patience wid 'im. Say 'Sam Slydel' to Joshuay, an' it's wuss 'n a red rag to a bull—an' so I lays out to be married an' clair out befo' Josh gits wind of it."

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“And so you find that you like him better than you do Josh, after all?”

At this, she gave a helpless shrug—and even laughed, languidly:

“I s’pec’ I ’ll have to let it go at dat. I been ingaged to Sam, off ’n an’ on, right along, jes a sort o’ loose ingagemint, for a side-pleasure—but, of cose, Sam ain’t in it wid Josh—not wid me! But—but—”

She was twirling Josh’s ring on her finger as she spoke.

“But—anything for a change,” she concluded, wearily. “Dat ’s all past hist’ry, now. An’ when I ’m gone, I wants to leave dis ingagemint ring o’ Josh’s wid you, please, Sir—so I ’ll be sho Josh gits it safe-t.”

“Would n’t you better leave it with me, now?” I scanned her face as I put the question. She seemed to be looking far afield as if, for the moment, forgetful of my presence, but, recovering herself, she turned her glance upon me while she said,

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slowly: "Not yit—not tel to-morrer night." And, as she turned away, she added: "Thanky, Jedge—thanky kindly—an' please to ricollec' dat dis is all private business, please, Sir."

"I shall not let Josh know that I have seen you—if that is what you mean?"

"Dat 's all—thanky, Sir." And she was gone—a slim silhouette against the sunset.

As soon as she had left the footpath, I started off in the direction of Joshua's cabin. All my testimony was in, now, and I saw my way to win my case. Before I had reached the fellow's door, however, I perceived him crossing the field in the opposite direction so I beckoned to him to come and we walked down the road together. I was glad to have this assurance that he could not possibly have seen the girl. It gave me the needed clearing for my manœuver.

"I am glad to see you, Josh," I began.

"I want to tell you that I will write your

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letter to-night—but you 'll have to come up to the house and dictate it.”

He gave me a quick look, but said nothing—so I went on:

“The truth is, if you put it off, Juney may not be here—that is if what I hear is true—and it came pretty straight.”

Still, no answer, although I saw that he was instantly interested.

“I wonder if you happen to know a fellow by the name of Slydel—Sam Slydel, I believe he calls himself?”

“Sam Sly Devil, you better say,” he snarled. “What 's he got to do wid Juney, I like to know?”

“He is coming down here to-morrow night, determined to marry her—and he has sent me word to be ready to tie the knot—that 's all I know.” And after a minute, I added: “Of course, this lets you out—and it will make things easy for you.”

I have seen some sudden transformations

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in my life, but never such as that wrought by the magic of a name which seemed to transform the apathetic youth of yesterday into a man of action and of fire.

“When?” The voice which asked the question was so low in the throat and so remote that it frightened me.

“I said to-morrow—to-morrow night,” I answered, and then sudden anger rose in me and flared—resentment in behalf of the girl. No doubt my voice was satirical when I added: “It gives you time to write the letter—and throw her over.”

Perhaps I may seem to have been taking unwarranted chances for the girl’s dignity, but I felt sure of my case.

“Write what?” he snarled again, and I quite forgave him for forgetting our relations for the moment. A tempest was raging within him and while he stood, silent, his face twitched with emotion.

Finally, he turned to me:

“Is you gwine be home to-night, Marse

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Horace—about eight o'clock?" He spoke now in the even voice of control.

"I shall be in my study as usual, from eight until ten," I answered—and that was all.

It was half-past eight and I was deep in the case of "*Schupert vs. Schupert*" when I heard a timid rap at my door and in reply to my none too amiable "Come in!" there entered the man, Joshua, leading by the hand none other than the maid, Juney Littlejohn.

"Why!" I exclaimed. "Is that you, Josh?" I had involuntarily risen as if in contemplation of that which was so soon to be required of me.

"Marse Horace—I means to say Jedge Ransom, I wushes to make you 'quainted wid Miss Juney Littlejohn."

"And so, this is Juney, of whom I have heard you speak so often. I am glad to know you, Juney." So I set her mind at rest and in her grateful glance I had my

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reward. "Joshua has been in love with you for a long time, my girl. He is a good boy—and I believe you are worthy of him." Then, turning to Joshua, I added, "And now, what can I do for you both?"

Josh fairly giggled the words out of shape as he replied:

"Git—git—git out de marryin'-book, please, Sir."

I have performed a good many similar ceremonies, first and last, but never one with more satisfaction than this. The fellow was fairly radiant in the glow of triumph and, if the girl never looked her name before, she might have impersonated the poet's month of June as she stood in her simple flowered muslin, fairly enwrapped in the glamour of the "perfect day" of love's fulfilment.

They had been gone only a few moments when Joshua was back again, for a parting

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word, while his bride waited at the gate.

“For Gord sake,” he almost whispered, forgetting that we were alone, “don’t let on to nobody, Marse Horace. I ain’t named dat chicken-stealin’ jail-bird to ’er—an’ she don’t know I s’picion nothin’—an’ could you, please, Sir, telephome de news o’ dis ma’iage over to Three Forks, right away, please, Sir?”

“We ain’t had much time sence I conversed wid you a while ago, but we ’s done some swif’ talkin’—an’ we gwine have de chu’ch-weddin’ a week f’om Sunday night—wid all proper bridesmaids an’ ring-cake—an’ everything. I don’t ’low to have little Juney stinted, jes on account o’ marryin’ a blame doggone fool like me, no, Sir! But, I tell you de truth, Marse Horace, nothin’ but a lightnin’-flash ’ll strike some folks! But I ’s struck wid a ‘lectric’ spark all right, now—an’ I ’s dat racklass happy, my foots ain’t touchin’ de groun’!



“Git — git — git out de marryin’-book, please sir”



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“An’ you ’ll sen’ de telephome, please, Sir? Thanky, Sir! An’ make it a peaceable message an’ I trus’ it ’ll git dar befo’ Sam Sly Devil gits started on his rampagious weddin’-journey. I may have to kill ’im off befo’ I die, yit—but I don’t crave to resk makin’ Juney a bridal gal-lows widder—an’ so sen’ de telephome, please, Sir!”

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ABSTRACT

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IT is all so strange—so incomprehensible—so impossible! And yet—

As I read over this marriage-notice, and realize the pain in my heart, I know by these witnesses that it is even so.

I, Mary Randolph, age beyond mention and of a dignity hitherto unassailed—Mary Randolph, artist, known among the socially elect, envied by many and questioned by none—Mary Randolph, well-seasoned widow of the proud statesman and soldier whose name she is said to ornament—I, yes, even I—standing alone in my little sky studio, taking my morning coffee which I have myself scientifically dripped—and which I have to-day drunk standing, not knowing that I stood, so great is my emotional upheaval—

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I am to-day a jilted woman!

(All the world 's a stage—and—what 's this tittering in the gallery?)

“Who cares for elderly romance?” Who, indeed, beyond its principals? Who else really believes in it? Who knows anything about it—who indeed, but the elderlies themselves?

And yet— What have we in earth's spring-time so rich and radiant, so affluent of color, so lavish of fragrance as autumn roses! What has the east, at early sunrise with all its serenities and silver insinuations, its glittering innuendoes and bland certitudes, to compare with the miracle of glory painted upon the west when the sun is low?

All this has been said, and better said, before now, no doubt—and what has it to do with me, Mary Randolph, and the marriage-notice which came up to me in the dumb-waiter in the columns of the *Morning Herald*, along with my half pint

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of cream and my rolls?—the notice which I happened to see only because the jar had turned and spilt my cream over his name, offering it to me thus, coupled with hers, in a rich, opaline translucence.

Dear me! How my soul shrieked at the sight! For the presentment was final as brief—just the names and date and place—Berlin, Oct. 5th. Evidently cabled. How grotesque a feature in a touring-party of elderlies! I could not afford to join them—fortunately—or unfortunately. How would it have been had I been of the party as planned?

And so it was that I stood and silently drank my coffee, not knowing that I stood, nor that my vacant chair was behind me all the time.

I believe, attempting analysis, that it is the technique of elderly romance which is uninviting. If this be true, I am saved, that is to say, *we* are saved from the ignominy of grotesqueness in this romance

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so suddenly cut short, for there was in it no technique whatsoever. Which is to say, he never said anything or did anything—or I never said or did anything which to the most fastidious scrutiny could be called romantic in the slightest degree.

Am I stripping the tale of any possible interest by this declaration, now at the onset? If so, even so, for I must be truthful, though I fail of appeal.

Is it a slim little story, then—meager and of middle-age—medium in quality and lukewarm—gray in tone and of a minor key?

Not on your life!

Behold this Indian peach which I hold in my hand, the autumnal fruitage of the tree's midsummer romance—on this seventh day of October! Is it mediocre, think you, with its downy cheek of red, its splendor of form, its affluent personality?

I stand at my window, now, and I lay the peach upon a clump of maple leaves beside

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a copper bowl in which there glow deep purples, blood-red with sap, in autumn bloom and grape.

No, you may not like our romance, but it is no more insipid or colorless than the burnished fruit reflected in this copper.

But listen:

I shall never forget the first time we met. I doubt whether he remembers, or remembered, even before he succumbed to that which has eventuated as shown in the marriage-notice. But I do so well remember.

He was one of three men at the dinner who, my friendly hostess forewarned me, were "especially worth while."

Yes, I met him at a dinner-party; I forgot to say that. My narrative will probably tumble over itself in places as I go along. It is all so fresh—three greedy flies still sap the cream from his name.

Yes, we met at dinner. Indeed, he took me in, or out, rather, for it was an *al fresco* affair served in a bower of bloom-

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ing wistaria in a conservatory at Lawrence and the women meant to surprise the men by appearing in Oriental costumes and the men got wind of it and really surprised us by filing in dressed as Chinese mandarins.

On this very first occasion while he sat beside me, I noticed that his shoulders were no higher than mine. But the thing which I felt—on this first day—was a sort of preëminence in the man, in spite of his smallness. Gently gray and elderly, he seemed one of those whose waters of life have crystallized at high tide.

I cannot tell why, but from the time we sat at table on that first evening to this writing—the length of four long seasons—I seem never to have been unconscious of this man's existence.

He had said very little, all told, and that little was, as he has ever been, distinctly impersonal.

With none of the effusiveness of certain mustaches across the table, he was kindly

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and clear with the really rare faculty of saying a right thing at a right time. Thoughts and countercurrents, as they passed his way, he handled and tossed along, often enriched, I was pleased to observe, and deftly fitted to some one else.

I think he liked me from the first. Of course, he never said so. That would have been high sentiment. Indeed, no. But we became friends, without formality or progression. It was as if, when we met, we *found that we were friends*—and went along quietly, accepting each other without question.

In a month or two, he had been several times to call—had sent me two or three books—dined with me and other friends, once—and I twice with him and his sister whom he wished “to know me” in their home—and once with him without other friends, at a good hotel. You see, we were not young people and so, not hedged in by conventions.

Since the first day he came and sat—in

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my armchair there by the window—he has never taken the slightest liberty that would have been unbecoming to that first day. He is always in good taste—such a contrast to Volsinger, the Omaha poet, who, because I had been friendly to him and Southly hospitable, calmly walked back and opened my ice-box one evening, in the presence of other guests and proceeded noisily to cut ice for his glass—and to pass it around, if you please. My ears burn, now, when I think of it—the gawk that he was—and is!

And yet, God likes him and gives him poems to write, real poems, and who am I to snub him? He may come and open my ice-box again. Indeed, he is far more diverting than the friend I mourn, is Volsinger, the crazy poet. It takes scope to realize him. He keeps one looking up and down—down at his execrable manners—and up to his inspirational plane.

But for a steady diet, day in and day

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out, there 's nothing like a quiet gentleman. The sun is n't exciting, in its daily uprisings and goings down—but it is good to live along with. Pyrotechnics are for holidays.

I am an artist, by profession—which is to say, my pictures are for sale—and they do sell. He, my friend, buys water-colors—buys them generously, but—strange I never thought of it before—he never seemed to think of buying one of mine. That he respects my art, I feel sure—or, no, perhaps I am mistaken. He praises my pictures behind my back, but possibly that which he really admires is only the pluck which makes me do them, for he reveres self-supporting women.

Very few of my friends buy my pictures and I 'm glad of it. It makes one feel shoppy and commercial to sell his wares. And yet—now that I think of it, it is queer that *he* who makes a fetish of color, and whose walls are aflame with it, should

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never have tried to possess one of the temperamental studies which have given me what vogue I enjoy. It is curious—and in the light of this shutting-off-of-light, I am analytical.

And he is married! And, while he does not know it, I am a jilted woman.

And how badly I am telling the story! And I care so much—dear, dear, I care so much!

It was this way:

You see, such a thing as marriage has never been in the back of my head. There 's no man on earth I 'd—

But what 's the use? He 's married now, and certainly marriage for me, after all these years, would be a great mistake. I may not paint great pictures, but, such as they are, they are mine. And I care for them—and I like to work any old way, any old time, when the spell is on—and to belong, legitimately, to no one but myself and what I have the temerity to call my art.

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Of course, a man is an interference, when you are married to him—even if he is a help. And then, there is always the question of one's duty to him—I mean there's no question as to one's duty to him, and a division of enthusiasms—?

What am I saying? I do so believe in the very thing which I am repudiating, Love and Life expressed to the full, individually and jointly—with mutual freedom, and all the rest of it. I hate set theories, but I believe a good many of them. Only, for me, it would never do. I am too—too temperamental, perhaps. I'm too something—and I'd soon be giving up my—

My art, of course—and taking to French house-gowns, and—and all that. Not that I despise clothes, as it is. I'm not that variety of artist. On the contrary, I enjoy dress, but not as a woman of fashion, for, it is so hopelessly bromidic just to follow.

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I suppose that, first and last, I am a colorist and I know I am amber-skinned,—that my eyes are gray-green and heavily lashed and my hair would have been red if it had n't been castor-colored. (The sun declares it is red, now, but it could never prove it behind its own back.) And so, I wear *aqua marines* and pale topazes—and tourmalines for frivolity—and gird my soft Empire gowns with dull gold and confine myself to one quiet tone throughout a toilet—and I make a point of slippers and wraps.

It is well for a person of wide color-feeling and narrow purse to be sensitive to the dangers of over dressing. It is so easy to step over the line—and to become ultra Bohemic and “queer.” I should n't so very much mind my friends calling me “picturesque,” but I cringe at the chance I'd give mine enemies. Think of even the good Bridget's looking after me, her mouth full of pins, after putting the last

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topaz into the back of my collar, and fearing to swallow such words as "holy show!"

My main bulwark of strength, my Gibraltar, is soap. Good simple soap, not too highly flavored of money or musk—yes, soap—and a manicure of restraint. These things—and a well-modulated voice—not too much thought about the latest pronunciations—and—

Well, just being a lady in the long ago sense of having been born that way. I like the old pronunciations, sometimes. These things are inherited, and perhaps they wear better than some of the newly-learned.

My manicure says "don't you?" with minute particularity—separating the words. Also, she says "*mischievous*" and suffers from a "bronical cough."

But why all this idle talk—when nothing matters?

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I hardly think so, and yet—it would have been largely on his account, my refusal. I'd have been afraid of getting on his nerves with my capriciousness—and my restless ways. He is restful.

But this has never been a question. I never have been—never, that is, since my widowhood—a marrying woman—either in my inner consciousness or in my relation to society. I hate a widow with a re-marrying attitude.

Of course, an occasional man has come along who thought I was the sort of woman to make him happy—and has mentioned it to me—but every woman has that sort of thing. We don't think anything of it in the South—but New York is different. Every proposal of marriage counts in Gotham. But I suppose I'll have men saying things to me until I'm ready to die of old age—most women have, probably. The only difference, when they are old, is

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that the subject is broached in the falsetto voices of either extreme, youth or senility. Few middle-aged men make love to middle-aged women, I find.

The aged seek matrimony rather than a special woman and I notice that when an old man asks a woman to marry him and she will not, he very soon finds one who will. Of this I am personally sure—seven times sure.

And here I am, generalizing on a theme of which I have not thought seriously for years. My life seemed full and tranquil, until *he* came into it—and now, it is all over—the romance which was never begun.

Not that I was a loveless, detached person before the casual incoming of this man. I am not of the abnormal type which can live and work—and *sing*—without love. Ah, no. Far from it! Not only abstract love, but love particular-

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ized—arms-about-the-neck—such love as children throw into a mother's soul when they wrap themselves about her. Love incarnate, personal, prodigal and unreckoning—such as this has ever been as essential to my being as pure oxygen to my broadly inflating lungs. Yes, and yet I have chosen to live alone, in a garret, practically, and here I have labored—and slept—*and worked*—AND SUNG!

And why?

“A dog? A cat? A parrot? A monkey?”

Perish the thought! No, none of these nor even the more nearly possible canary. No bird or beast or slight intelligence could ever counterfeit love to me or attempt to satisfy my soul with the limited triumph of the inadequate.

Not that I do not love a dog and eschew cats only because they are cats—but no lower beast could ever knock at the door of my holy of holies, much less enter in,

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by bark or song. The open sesame must be a pass-word from a soul of equal height with mine. The waters must be "even."

And so—

"A memory?"

Ah, this has gone far enough—and yet—why "*a* memory"? One word is enough. Behold the symbols which surround me! A baby's miniature—that little clock—he made that with his own hands, my husband. Yes, he was a lawyer, not a clock-smith—made it on a bet with me, when he was nineteen. No, it never kept business time, exactly. He called it Cupid's clock, because he said it gave a fellow a chance. It really ran very little and kept stopping. Ah, how frivolous we were—and how young!

And how happy! The joy of it has sweetened all of life for me—yes, I can say that, even to-day, when I am more lonely than I have ever been in all my life before.

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What is love individualized? Is it not, after all, a mental concept? The maiden who sits mooning, gazing into the blue, and dreaming dreams of the miracle which she comprehends not at all—who shall say that she is loveless? And the wizened old man in the almshouse who traces “her” outline from memory in the light of his charity fire, why is he smiling? He only seems to be alone. He is not, for when the last embers shall have fallen, he will still see her, in his dreams.

This is not bare abstraction. It is love personal, incarnate—clothed with “flesh of dreams,” maybe—but which is the dream?

.

I cannot tell precisely when I first knew that I cared for this man—perhaps not fully until now—it seems a century ago—when I saw that notice—a death notice for me in the marriage column. There are landmarks, though, easily traced, which show me how it has been for a long time.

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Vividly do I recall my first semi-awakening.

We were going up the steps of the Architectural League Building one evening, when I tripped on my skirt and had nearly fallen when his hand caught my arm, and a quick, "*Oh, my dear!*" of alarm, fell upon my ear—and into my soul.

It was inadvertent, and meant nothing, possibly, excepting that his reserve was one of tenderness to women. I did not think it meant anything.

And yet, perhaps because his lips were so near my ear, there was something unspeakably precious in it. For me it spanned the years and I was a wife again, blessed, clothed with honor, remembered of Heaven.

I knew that it was probably reminiscent—and irrelevant. And yet, he was never quite the same to me, after that. In an unguarded moment he had called me "*my dear*"—but he said it as only one other

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had ever done. From that moment whether I would or no, his presence was ever with me.

It was one of the sweetest experiences of my life when I let myself go in resting in the companionship of this man. If I had thought of marriage—or of having him a lover declared—I should have been as perturbed as a girl, plus the fitting fluster of an elderly person given over to folly. How absurd I should have known myself to be! But no. My romance was far and away superior to that sort of thing.

But why all this? He is married.

If I had only known—or suspected—that he might go!

If only it had occurred to me that he might think of marriage—and another woman! Could I have tried to capture him? I do not know. The thing is so much greater than I. Perhaps I could never have manipulated it—or him through it. At any rate, I did not try. For me

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this sort of thing was long passed and the luxury of Love was a gift of Heaven—dropped into my hand. I wanted no return in kind. A conventional declaration would have vulgarized my happiness—and it would have flown. A pressure of the hand—?

No, I wanted—God knows what I wanted. I suppose I was a fool. I wanted to think of him every day, when he came and when he did n't—and to believe that, if he should ever forget himself again, he would call me “my dear”—but only if he forgot.

I used to have a merry little feeling of mischief within me in having a secret from him.

That woman—she whose name got the edge of my cream this morning—has no more soul than a bean arbor. Indeed, that is a most inapt comparison, for, of all vines, the bean is one of the most kindly, the most beneficent, the most generous,

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most prodigal of self—and I am sure it has a good womanly soul with a love for children and tendrils of compassionate reaches toward old age.

Its great benediction of greenery is not for itself alone but for all who would have grateful shade without stint or measure. No, let me drop that comparison, for the vine's sake.

The name which grows more distinct as the oil penetrates the paper—this name stands for so many respectable things that I prove my hardihood while I hold it up for scrutiny.

She was asked to dine at the house in Washington Square where, with a gentle deaf twin sister, also unmarried, he lives in the crystallized elegance of a bygone period. She went—she saw—and she laid siege—to the ear-trumpet! The canny diplomat! And that evening she began to set the type for this wedding-notice.

So she proceeded, with no such handi-

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cap of cardiac disturbance as would have been my undoing, had I even considered so brave a campaign. I should have been unable to avoid his eyes—those small, inconsequent dear, direct, blue eyes before which I have no reason to quail.

They would have overridden me—accused me. I should have hated myself—hated his lovely old house with its queer ungainly furniture which has been my delight—even hated him, after a while, maybe—hated the whole business—and floundered.

Or, if I had resolutely undertaken to marry him, willy nilly, I might—

No, no, no! I could not! I am a woman and—well, my sort of woman can't do the chasing. Much is written these days about the new woman—or the new way—or new interpretations of the old way. One has told us about *superman*. Perhaps the difference is as between *super* and *sub*.

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No, my holy passion is of so fine a flame that it will burn as clearly now, being without dross, as it did that evening when I trod on my skirt and tripped into Heaven.

Well, it 's the way of the world! One woman loves a man—and another marries him.

I say he jilted me and so he did—although he is ethically innocent of the crime. Or I hope he is. If he suspected me—then he is guilty—but no. He did not suspect. He realized that I had too much sense—was too well poised—would have been too proud. And I had had my romance. So had he. She died at seventeen when he was twenty.

No, I feel that my secret is safe, even in face of the fact that man, generically and specifically, is vainglorious and conceited.

Knowing me as well as he did, he could

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not have suspected me. Indeed, knowing myself as well as I do, I am mystified.

Why, by all that is sacred, did I encourage this quiet man to come and sit, evening after evening, just filling a chair—of course, he could not know that he filled my life—when there were a dozen other men, full of jest and sparkle and far more in sympathy with my work, for whom I never could find time? Why, I say, excepting because things were as I have confessed.

I feel sure he did not suspect and yet, my secret may have been written all over me, scribbled on my breast. It may have dripped from the fringe of my sleeves—enveloped me, as a mist.

The tones of my voice were different, in speaking to him. This I knew, but I was fearless as he could not know how I spoke to others. Just the simple love-to-have-him-near and the peace-of-the-long-

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evenings when he stayed and talked quietly, of common things—just the sweet contentment of it may have found expression in my voice—and now, I almost hope it did.

If this woman really loved him, I should not mind—so much; or if he loved her—which he *does not and never will*.

She had all she wanted but one thing—the prestige of a dignified home, with a man of place at the head of it—a better-than-hotel address from which to issue her cards—a table-of-hospitality and a retinue, with horses and motor-cars, of her own.

And so,—and so—?

I don't know anything about it. Maybe it is well with him, after all.

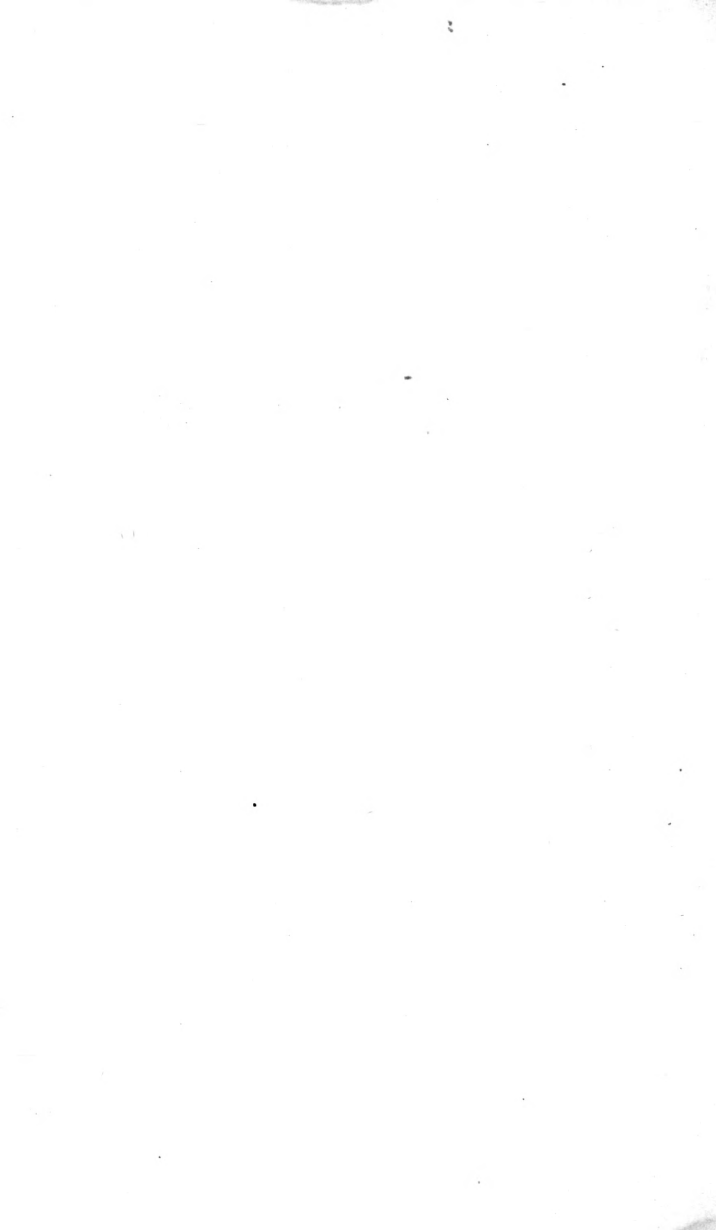
What is love, anyway? Is it a mental habit—or vibration—or a hoodoo—or all three and more? Who knows?

Who knows anything?

Perhaps, after all, "Whatever is, is



Why, by all that is sacred, did I encourage this quiet man?



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right," as the transgressors claim. And yet—

For a material consideration, I am robbed of a sweet companionship which can count for nothing to the despoiler of my peace, for she loves a breeze, and he is a quiet man. He is clear of intellect and discerns every shade of difference between white and near-white, truth and half-truth—while she is dense—and correct—and strong in faith in the Apostles' Creed and the Ten Commandments. And she would consider me wholly dishonored if she knew how I miss, and shall miss her husband.

.

This is all wrong, this wail.

Perhaps it is well that he is married—and even to her. He is fine and sensitive, tempered as refined steel, and her imperturbable stupidity may be his pillow-ing. He will rest in it—and when he flies off the handle, as he is bound to do, once

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in a while, and she coddles him blindly, ignoring his real grievance, he will buy another ring for her fat fingers—to make amends for her vacuity—although he may not know it.

Yes, I can follow them along. But some day, he will wake and see her, as she is—mediocre, tiresome, consistent, impossible—bromide of bromides. Then, he will be better to her than ever. But he will spend more time at the club. Always suspect a man when he begins to be “better than ever” to a tiresome woman. He has found a perspective.

Of course, I shall see little of them. It is best so—although *there has never been anything between us.*

I am better-looking than she and younger and I have more sense, more heart, more style, more temperament. I mean to say I have temperament. She has more money than I—but I never cared for money. They were both rich enough before, so,

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probably they don't care, either—so long as the money is there. I don't care when it is n't there.

She had everything but a fixed social place and an establishment. These she wanted—and she got them.

I loved him, and I wanted nothing—and I got it—and yet I seem to have a grievance.

To love and to lose is high fate!

.
Here I stand talking, and the north light wasting. It must be— What is that? The little clock—David's clock—striking two, so it must be nearly three, at least. You can always depend upon David's clock for one thing: when it strikes, there 's no time to lose.

How weird my laughter sounds against your striking, dear little clock—dear, crazy little clock!

We are nearer than ever to each other now, little clock, you and I. It seems ages

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ago—and the past is with me again. You and the little shoe seem to nestle against my heart to-day—

Your striking admonishes me that she was coming at three, the old model who is to pose for the long-delayed picture. The afternoon sun is in those nasturtiums now and she will be arriving—the pitiful old, old woman who will impersonate “Woe,” and who declares she has had nothing in life but disappointment and want—nothing but woe. Never love.

And yet, she refused to allow me to unfasten the old locket which she wears about her neck on the faded string with the *Agnus Dei*—not even for a moment that I might examine it.

She lies. She is love's wreckage and this is its symbol, this miserable, dirty locket with the cracked enamel.

She has exactly what I have—only symbols. We are sisters. Ah, me! They are the most enduring possessions,

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after all—and the poorer, the more intangible, the surer. Were she to lose the cherished locket, that which gives it value would still be hers in Memory—and with less care to keep. My wee shoe of fading blue—

How all things seem to pass before me this morning, in the light—I mean to say in the shade of this fresh sorrow!

Dear God! And it is true. He is married. If only I had realized that the hours were precious with him—and tried—

And what about my pictures—my work—the work which has been languishing—playing around old stakes instead of going ahead, these last four years?

What about consecration—and the divine fire—and—?

Bless the good God! Who cares about these things when Love comes and it is October—and the roses are red with fullness of life and the cider-mills are busy and the hills aflame? Who says I am

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alone! Only one symbol poorer am I, now that he is gone. He was but a symbol.

I never loved him. I loved ease and companionship—and these he typified.

.

Here she is, now—the old model. She always forgets the bell and knocks at the door with her bare knuckles—like death.

Poor, bereft, lonely human! I must meet her, smiling:

“Good afternoon, dear Miss Flannahan! And how are you, this lovely day? Do come and have a cup of tea. I recognized your familiar rap and I lit the flame under the kettle before I let you in. And this cream—delight me by taking it. I forgot it this morning.

“What ’s that you say? I forgot it ‘because I was so happy’? Well, maybe so. They say we never know when we are happy. To be sure, I’ve been pottering

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around, talking to my things—and laughing—ever since I got up.

“Sit here, dear Miss Flannahan—on the divan where you can’t help seeing my nasturtium-box catching fire in the sun—and while you take your tea, I’ll go and set the easel in the north window.

“And—

“Oh, *dear* Miss Flannahan, do smile that way again! I wonder if you could? It is great! Oh, it is magnificent! The nasturtium flames pale before it!

“Oh, Miss Flannahan, I wonder what is happening! Something is being enacted within me, as I stand in this shaft of light—it is a miracle.

.
“Do I look strange, I wonder? Is it a transfiguration? Is it inspiration? God has remembered us—set us apart—given us a commission, you and me.

“That wan smile—

THE AFTERGLOW

“We are to have a great picture! Oh, what it must have cost you—and what it is costing me!

“Surrender! That’s the word—then come peace—and the afterglow. Sunset and a red sky.

“I have changed the name of the picture—the great picture which we are to do together—you and I, with our symbols about us—symbols of surrender—renunciation. Your smile changed it.

“We will call it ‘The Afterglow’!

“There will be those who will say that it should have been named ‘Faith’ or ‘Immortality,’ or one of a dozen abstractions, but we shall know better, you and I—yes, we shall know. It will mean Love buried out of sight but still ours—Love which earth cannot take away—Love which is immortal—which is divine. Divinity never *was*. It is.

“The precious baby curl—this absurd little clock which he made with his own

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hands, my lover—and that empty chair, turned as he left it, where a lost comrade sat less than a month ago—the locket which you will not let me take from your neck—

“We may lose them, for they are only symbols of symbols—but that which makes them precious—it is *ours—yours and mine*. Nothing can rob us of—

“Forgive me! Do forgive me! I have hurt you—I did not mean—I was cruel—but I won’t again, no, not again—

“But you will smile for me—again—as you did—? And oh, what a picture we shall have!

“I want to tell you something, Miss Flannahan. Only those who are permitted to empty the cup of life may taste of immortality in its dregs before the grave. There is a cup of death, but of this I do not speak. But I won’t talk of sorrow any more, dear Miss Flannahan—positively not.

“Yes, I am a little queer—don’t try to

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understand or to follow. Just know that there is a bond between us—the bond of suffering—of renunciation. It has left you a smile which will send a gleam of hope down the ages—if I, to whom it has left energy and a clearing—if I prove fit.

“Ah, the clearing! The empty, lonely clearing in which to work! How long I have been playing!

“What is a sunset and a red sky?

“The great picture will tell—and the people will kneel, and believe! *The great picture!*—THE AFTERGLOW!”

THE END

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